



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

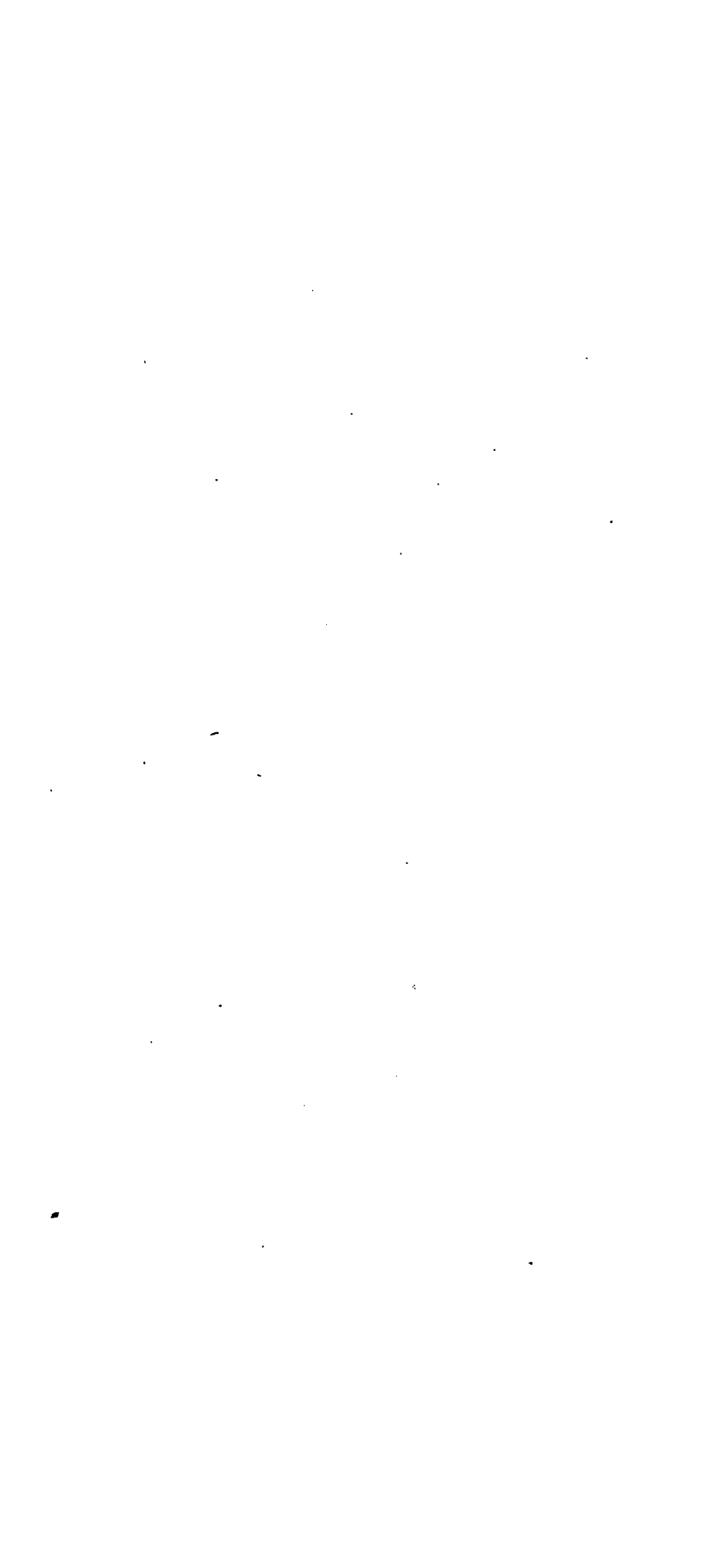
About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>









of the Council of Scotland a literary
essayist who published under his
pseudonym.



LEISURE HOURS IN TOWN

LONDON

PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE AND CO.

NEW-STREET SQUARE

LEISURE HOURS IN TOWN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

‘THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON.’

NEW EDITION.

LONDON:

LONGMAN, GREEN, LONGMAN, ROBERTS, & GREEN.

1864.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

	PAGE
CONCERNING THE PARSON'S LEISURE HOURS IN TOWN	1

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING SCREWS: BEING THOUGHTS ON THE PRACTICAL SERVICE OF IMPERFECT MEANS .	12
--	----

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING SOLITARY DAYS	56
------------------------------------	----

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING FUTURE YEARS	92
-----------------------------------	----

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THINGS SLOWLY LEARNT	140
---	-----

CHAPTER VI.

CONCERNING VEAL; A DISCOURSE OF IMMATURITY .	185
--	-----

CHAPTER VII.

GONE	PAGE 235
----------------	-------------

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING PEOPLE OF WHOM MORE MIGHT HAVE BEEN MADE	247
--	-----

CHAPTER IX.

CONCERNING PEOPLE WHO CARRIED WEIGHT IN LIFE : WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON THOSE WHO NEVER HAD A CHANCE	291
---	-----

CHAPTER X.

COLLEGE LIFE AT GLASGOW	333
-----------------------------------	-----

CONCLUSION	380
----------------------	-----

CHAPTER I.

CONCERNING THE PARSON'S LEISURE HOURS IN TOWN.

THIS is Friday evening. It has been a gloomy November day. And now, about nine o'clock, I hear the wind moaning as if there were to be a stormy night. But the fire is blazing, and the curtains are drawn : and here, in this little room, once the study of a wit and a poet, things are almost as quiet as if it were miles away from the great city in which it is. You might hear an occasional shout, from a street which is not far distant : and I am aware of a sound which appears to originate in the beating of carpets in the lane behind this row of houses. But the door-bell, which rings perpetually in the forenoon, and very frequently in the evening, is not likely to be rung any more to-night by any one whose business is with me : and no humble parishioner, interrupting the thread of one's thoughts, is likely to come now upon his little errand to his minister. This is indeed an hour of leisure : and

oh, what a rest and relief such an hour is, to the man who has it only now and then !

Both my sermons for Sunday are ready ; and they are in a drawer in this table on which I write. I have seen, I believe, every sick person in the congregation on some day during this week. As for the parish, *that* is by far too large and populous to be personally overtaken by any single clergyman : but I have the great comfort of being aided by a machinery of district visitation, which does not suffer one poor person in the parish to feel that he is forgotten in his parish church. I cannot, at this moment, think of any one matter of ministerial duty which demands instant attention : though of course I have the vague sense, which I suppose will never be absent, that there are many duties impending ; many things which Monday morning at the latest will bring. Surely, then, if such are ever to come in a large town parish, here is one of my leisure hours.

When a country parson, leaving a little rustic cure, undertakes the charge of such a parish, if he be a man whose heart is in his work, he is quite certain greatly to over-work himself. It is indeed a total change, from the quiet of a country parish, where dwellings are dotted singly here and there, with great fields between them ; to the town, where street after street of tall houses is filled with your parishioners, all entitled to some measure of your

care and thought. And with that change, there comes a sudden acceleration of the wheels of life. You begin to live in a hurry. Your mind gets into a feverish state. You live under a constant feeling of pressure. You think, while you are doing anything, that something else is waiting to be done. It need not be said that such a feeling is, with most men, quite fatal to doing one's best : more particularly with the pen. And if you be of an anxious temperament, the time never comes in which you can sit down and rest, feeling that your work is done. You sit down sometimes and rest, through pure fatigue and exhaustion : but all the while you are thinking of something else which demands to be done, and which you are anxious to do. You will often wish for the precious power possessed by some men, of taking things easily : you may even sometimes sigh for the robust resolution of Lord Chancellor Thurlow. 'I divide my work,' he said, 'into three parts. Part I do : part does itself : and part I leave undone.' But many men could not for their lives resolve to do this last. They go with a hearty will at their work, till body and mind break down.

There is no work so hard, to a conscientious man, as that which he may make as easy or as hard as he chooses. It is a great blessing to have one's task set ; and to be able to feel, when you have done it, that your work is done ; and that you may rest with a clear conscience. But in the Church, *that* can

never be. There is always something more that might be done. What clergyman can say that he has done for the good of his parish all that is possible for man to do;—that there is no new religious or benevolent agency which by energy yet more unsparing might be set in operation? It may here be said, that I do not in any degree approve the system of trying to dragoon people, whether poor or rich, into attention to their religious duties and interests, which is attempted by some good people whose zeal exceeds their discretion: and that I have no fancy for making a church, what with perpetual meetings, endless societies, and ever-recurring collections of money for this and that purpose, look like nothing so much as a great cotton-mill, with countless wheels whirring away, and dazing the brain by their ceaseless motion. It is fit to recognise the fact, that the poorest folk are responsible beings; and that intelligent artisans will not submit to be treated like children, even by people who wish to make them good children. And you know that a boy, who has learnt to swim by the aid of corks and bladders, is very apt to sink when that support is taken away. His power of swimming is not worth much. It seems to me to be even so with that form of religion which can be kept alive only by a constant series of visits, exhortations, tracts, and week-day church-services. I venture to judge no man: but give me, say I, not the sickly exotic; but the hearty evergreen, that can

bear frosts and winds. But the faithful clergyman, even trying to hold this principle in view, will find, in a large parish in a great city, work that would occupy him profitably, were each of his days as long as a week, and had he the strength of half a score of men. I firmly believe, that almost all the clergymen I know, do day by day their very utmost to overtake that overwhelming duty. And now and then, there comes a special sense of the clergyman's weighty responsibility, and of the momentous consequences that may depend upon his exertions: and under that stimulus, resolving 'to spend and be spent' in the work to which he has given himself, you will find him labouring in a fashion that endangers health and life.

Now, it is not right to do *that*. Even setting apart the consideration of the duty he owes his children, his duty to the Church is to work in that fashion in which he may hope to labour longest and most efficiently. And that fashion is not the breathless and feverish one. Yet nothing but constant watchfulness and firmness can prevent the town clergyman's life from growing one of chronic hurry and weariness. It is not merely his preaching, and his preparation for preaching: but the other calls of duty are innumerable. Pound after pound is added, till the camel labours along with weary foot; or even till the camel's back is broken. It is the rule in large towns, so far as I have known them, that the

clergy shall be overwrought. Not that they are overdriven by the unreasonable expectations of their parishioners ; though that may sometimes be the case : but that they are spurred on by the exactions of their own conscience. Then, every now and then, you will find one making a stand against this over-pressure ; feeling that he is breaking down ; and determining that he must have some leisure. You will find him beginning to take an hour's daily walk ; or resolutely setting himself to maintain some acquaintance with the literature of the day. You will find him resolving to see a little of his fellow-creatures, besides what he sees of them in the way of his duty ; and wondering if many men know what it is to feel, for days together, every word they speak an effort, and almost every step they walk. But all this is as when you determine to break yourself of the bad habit of walking too fast. You are walking along at five miles an hour. You pull up, and resolve you shall walk slowly. You set off at a moderate pace. But in a few minutes you cease to think of the rate at which you are progressing : and in a quarter of an hour you find of a sudden that you are going on at your old unreasonable speed again.


Going through your duty at this high pressure, you will, in a few months, find what will follow. Your brain gets fevered : your mind is confused : you cannot take a calm and deliberate view of any

large subject: and by degrees your heart (I speak literally, not morally) tells you that this will not do. You seem almost to have lost the power of sleeping. And you find, that if you are to live and labour much longer in this world, you must do one of two things: either you must go back again to the country, or you must make a definitive arrangement that you shall have some appreciable amount of leisure in town. You may probably find, on looking back, that for a long time you have had none at all: except, indeed, in that autumnal holiday, which will not suffice to keep up for a whole year's work: and whose good effect you have probably used up within three weeks after its close. Yes, you must have leisure: a little of it every day: a half-holiday at least once a week. And I do not call it satisfactory leisure, when, at the close of a jading day, you sit down, wearied beyond talking, reading, or thinking: and feeling the presence even of your children too much for your shaken nerves. I call it leisure, when you can sit down in the evening, tired, indeed; but not exhausted beyond chasing your little boy or girl about the lobby, and thinking of the soft green turf of quieter days. I call it leisure to sit down in your easy-chair by the fireside, and to feel that you may peacefully think, and dream if you please: that you may look vacantly into the fire: that you may read the new review or magazine by little bits: that you may give your mind total rest. And to

8 *Concerning the Parson's*

this end, let us fix it in our remembrance, that all our Master requires of us is to do what we can : and that if after we have done our utmost, there still remains much more we would wish to do, we must train ourselves to look at it without disquiet, even as we train ourselves to be submissive in the presence of the inexplicable mysteries and the irremediable evils which are inherent in the present system of things. No doubt, it is hard to do this ; but it is the clergyman's duty to do it. You have no more right to commit suicide by systematically overtasking your constitution, than by swifter and coarser means. Life is given to you as a trust to make the best of : and probably the worst you can make of it is to cut it short, or to embitter it by physical exhaustion and depression.

I dare say many clergymen with large parishes have known what it is to delight in a day of dreadful rain and hurricane : I mean a day when chimney-pots and slates are flying about the streets ; and when no question can be raised, even by the most exacting moral sense, as to whether it is possible to go out or not. A forenoon of leisure comes so very seldom, that it is very precious and enjoyable when it comes. The leisure hours commonly attainable are in the evening. If you sit at your desk from ten o'clock in the morning till one or two in the afternoon ; and if you then go out to your pastoral work till six : you may very fairly lay it down



as a general rule, that at six the day's work shall be deemed over. In addition to this, it may be well to make the afternoon of Saturday a time of recreation. You will be much fitter for your Sunday work, which implies a good deal of physical fatigue as well as mental wear. And I begin to doubt if it be good or safe to begin the round of labour again on Monday after breakfast: and to think that possibly as much work would be done, and better done, if the forenoon of that day were given to recruiting one's energies after the Sunday duty. And I am not claiming these seasons of leisure for the clergyman, merely for Aristotle's reason: merely because 'the end of work is to enjoy leisure:' merely because leisure is pleasant, and the hardworking parson has earned it fairly. I think not merely of the pleasure of the pastor, but of the profit of the flock. I do not think it expedient that a Christian congregation should get almost all its religious instruction from a fevered and overdriven mind. I have been struck, in listening to the preaching of one or two very able and very laborious friends, by a certain lack of calmness and sobriety of thought: by a something that reminded one of the atmosphere of a hothouse, and that seemed undefinably inconsistent with the realities of daily life. And it seemed to me that all this came of the fact, that they lived, worked, and wrote, in chronic excitement and hurry.

I trust that my non-clerical readers will pardon

all this professional matter : it is a comfort to talk out one's mind even to friends whom one will never see. I dare say discerning folk will know, that the writer has been describing his own constant temptation ; and that, however needful he may feel these seasons of rest to be, it is only now and then that he can train himself to take them. And he has found that nothing gives the mind more effectual rest, than change of employment. You have heard, doubtless, of that mill-horse, which all days of the week but Sunday was engaged in walking round and round a certain narrow circle. You may remember what was the Sunday's occupation of that sagacious creature. An unthinking person might have surmised that the horse, which had perpetually to walk on working days, would have chosen on its day of rest to lie still and do nothing. But the horse knew better. It spent Sunday in walking round and round, in the opposite direction from that in which it walked on weekdays. It found rest, in short, not in idleness ; but in variation of employment. I commend that horse. I have tried to do something analogous to what it did. These essays have been to me a pleasant change, from the writing of many sermons. And even in leisure hours, if it be (as Sydney Smith said) 'the nature of the animal to write,' the pen will be taken up naturally and habitually.

I can say sincerely, that more important duties

have never been postponed to the production of these chapters : and I please myself with the belief, that the hands into which this volume is likely to fall, will not be those of total strangers. You may perhaps find, my friendly reader, that these essays of an old friend, whom you knew in the days when he was a country parson, have somewhat changed their character, in consistence with his total change of life. But I have reason to cherish a quiet trust, that they have done good to some of my fellow-creatures. I suppose the like happens to all authors, who write in sincerity and in kindness of heart : but I cannot forget what numbers of men and women otherwise unknown, from either side of the Atlantic, have cheered and encouraged the writer, sometimes in weary hours, by thanking him for some little good impression left by these pages upon heart and life. I have not been able to forego the great delight of trying to produce what might afford some pleasure and profit to friends far beyond the boundaries of my parish ; nor have I been able to think that it was my duty to do so.

CHAPTER II.

CONCERNING SCREWS :

*Being Thoughts on the Practical Service of
Imperfect Means.*

A CONSOLATORY ESSAY.

ALMOST every man is what, if he were a horse, would be called a screw. Almost every man is unsound. Indeed, my reader, I might well say even more than this. It would be no more than truth, to say that there does not breathe any human being who could satisfactorily pass a thorough examination of his physical and moral nature by a competent inspector.

I do not here enter on the etymological question, why an unsound horse is called a screw. Let that be discussed by abler hands. Possibly the phrase set out at length originally ran, that an unsound horse was an animal in whose constitution there was a screw loose. And the jarring effect produced upon any machine by looseness on the part of a screw which ought to be tight, is well known to

thoughtful and experienced minds. By a process of gradual abbreviation, the phrase indicated passed into the simpler statement, that the unsound steed was himself a screw. By a bold transition, by a subtle intellectual process, the thing supposed to be wrong in the animal's physical system was taken to mean the animal in whose physical system the thing was wrong. Or, it is conceivable that the use of the word screw implied that the animal, possibly in early youth, had got some unlucky twist or wrench, which permanently damaged its bodily nature, or warped its moral development. A tendon perhaps received a tug which it never quite got over. A joint was suddenly turned in a direction in which Nature had not contemplated its ever turning; and the joint never played quite smoothly and sweetly again. In this sense, we should discern in the use of the word *screw*, something analogous to the expressive *Scot-ticism*, which says of a perverse and impracticable man, that he is a *thrawn* person; that is, a person who has got a *thraw* or twist; or rather, a person the machinery of whose mind works as machinery might be conceived to work which had got a *thraw* or twist. The reflective reader will easily discern that a complex piece of machinery, by receiving an unlucky twist, even a slight twist, would be put into a state in which it would not go sweetly, or would not go at all.

After this *excursus*, which I regard as not un-

worthy the attention of the Dean of Westminster, who has for long been, through his works, my guide and philosopher in all matters relating to the *study of words*, I recur to the grand principle laid down at the beginning of the present dissertation, and say deliberately, that ALMOST EVERY MAN THAT LIVES, IS WHAT, IF HE WERE A HORSE, WOULD BE CALLED A SCREW. Almost every man is unsound. Every man (to use the language of a veterinary surgeon) has in him the seeds of unsoundness. You could not honestly give a warranty with almost any mortal. Alas ! my brother ; in the highest and most solemn of all respects, if *soundness* ascribed to a creature implies that it is what it ought to be, who shall venture to warrant any man sound !

I do not mean to make my readers uncomfortable, by suggesting that every man is physically unsound : I speak of intellectual and moral unsoundness. You know, the most important thing about a horse is his body ; and accordingly when we speak of a horse's soundness or unsoundness, we speak physically ; we speak of his body. But the most important thing about a man is his mind ; and so, when we say a man is sound or unsound, we are thinking of mental soundness or unsoundness. In short, the man is mainly a soul ; the horse is mainly and essentially a body. And though the moral qualities even of a horse are of great importance,—such qualities as

vice (which in a horse means malignity of temper), obstinacy, nervous shyness (which carried out into its practical result becomes *shying*); still the name of screw is chiefly suggestive of physical defects. Its main reference is to wind and limb. The soundness of a horse is to the philosophic and stable mind suggestive of good legs, shoulders, and hoofs; of uncongested lungs and free air-passages; of efficient eyes and entire freedom from staggers. It is the existence of something wrong in these matters which constitutes the unsound horse, or screw.

But though the great thing about rational and immortal man is the soul: and though accordingly the most important soundness or unsoundness about *him* is that which has its seat *THERE*; still, let it be said that even as regards physical soundness there are few men whom a veterinary surgeon would pass, if they were horses. Most educated men are physically in very poor condition. And particularly the cleverest of our race, in whom intellect is most developed and cultivated, are for the most part in a very unsatisfactory state as regards bodily soundness. They rub on: they manage somehow to get through their work in life; but they never feel brisk or buoyant. They never know high health, with its attendant cheerfulness. It is a rare case to find such a combination of muscle and intellect as existed in Christopher North: the commoner type is the shambling Wordsworth, whom even his partial sister

thought so mean-looking when she saw him walking with a handsome man. Let it be repeated, most civilized men are physically unsound. For one thing, most educated men are broken-winded. They could not trot a quarter of a mile without great distress. I have been amused, when in church I have heard a man beyond middle age singing very loud, and plainly proud of his volume of voice, to see how the last note of the line was cut short for want of wind. I say nothing of such grave signs of physical unsoundness as little pangs shooting about the heart, and little dizzinesses of the brain; these matters are too serious for this page. But it is certain that educated men, for the most part, have great portions of their muscular system hardly at all developed, through want of exercise. The legs of even hard brain-workers are generally exercised a good deal; for the constitutional exercise of such is usually walking. But in large towns such men give fair play to no other thews and sinews. More especially the arms of such men are very flabby. The muscle is soft and slender. If the fore legs of a horse were like that, you could not ride him but at the risk of your neck.

Still, the great thing about man is the mind; and when I set out by declaring that almost every man is unsound, I was thinking of mental unsoundness. Most minds are unsound. No horse is accepted as sound in which the practised eye of the veterinarian


can find some physical defect, something away from normal development and action. And if the same rule be applied to us, my readers ; if every man is mentally a screw, in whose intellectual and moral development a sharp eye can detect something not right in the play of the machinery or the formation of it ; then I fancy that we may safely lay it down as an axiom, that there is not upon the face of the earth a perfectly sane man. A sane mind means a healthy mind ; that is, a mind that is exactly what it ought to be. Where shall we discover such a one ? My reader, you have not got it. I have not got it. Nobody has got it. No doubt, at the first glance, this seems startling ; but I intend this essay to be a consolatory one, and I wish to show you that in this world it is well if means will fairly and decently suffice for their ends, even though they be very far from being all that we could wish. God intends not that this world should go on upon a system of optimism. It is enough, if things are so, that they *will do*. They might do far better. And let us remember, that though a veterinary surgeon would tell you that there is hardly such a thing as a perfectly sound horse in Britain, still in Britain there is very much work done, and well done, by horses. Even so, much work, fair work, passable work, noble work, magnificent work, may be turned off, and day by day is turned off, by minds which, in strict severity, are no better than good, workable, or showy screws.

Many minds, otherwise good and even noble, are unsound upon the point of Vanity. Nor is the unsoundness one that requires any very sharp observer to detect. It is very often extremely conspicuous; and the merest blockhead can discern, and can laugh at, the unfortunate defect in one who is perhaps a great and excellent man. Many minds are off the balance in the respect of Suspiciousness; many in that of absurd Prejudice. Many are unsound in the matters of Silliness, Pettiness, Pettedness, Perversity, or general Unpleasantness and *Thrawn-ness*. Multitudes of men are what in Scotland is called *Cat-witted*. I do not know whether the word is intelligible in England. It implies a combination of littleness of nature, small self-conceit, readiness to take offence, determination in little things to have one's own way, and general impracticability. There are men to whom even the members of their own families do not like to talk about their plans and views: who will suddenly go off on a long journey without telling any one in the house till the minute before they go; and concerning whom their nearest relatives think it right to give you a hint that they are rather peculiar in temper, and you must mind how you talk to them. There are human beings whom to manage into doing the simplest and most obvious duty, needs, on your part, the tact of a diplomatist combined with the skill of a driver of refractory pigs. In short, there are in human beings

all kinds of mental twists and deformities. There are mental lameness and broken-windedness. Mental and moral shying is extremely common. As for biting, who does not know it? We have all seen human biters; not merely backbiters, but creatures who like to leave the marks of their teeth upon people present too. There are many kickers; men who in running with others do (so to speak) kick over the traces, and viciously lash out at their companions with little or no provocation. There are men who are always getting into quarrels, though in the main warm-hearted and well-meaning. There are human jibbers: creatures that lie down in the shafts instead of manfully (or horsefully) putting their neck to the collar, and going stoutly at the work of life. There are multitudes of people who are constantly suffering from depression of spirits, a malady which appears in countless forms. There is not a human being in whose mental constitution there is not something wrong; some weakness, some perversion, some positive vice. And if you want further proof of the truth of what I am saying, given by one whose testimony is worth much more than mine, go and read that painfully interesting book lately published by Dr. Forbes Winslow, on *Obscure Diseases of the Brain and Mind*; and you will leave off with the firmest conviction that every breathing mortal is mentally a screw.

And yet, my reader, if you have some knowledge

of horse-flesh, and if you have been accustomed in your progress through life (in the words of Dr. Johnson) to practise observation, and to look about you with extensive view, your survey must have convinced you that great part of the coaching and other horse work of this country is done, and fairly done, by screws. These poor creatures are out in all kinds of weather, and it seems to do them little harm. Any one who knows how snug, dry, and warm a gentleman's horses are kept, and how often with all that they are unfit for their duty, will wonder to see poor cab horses shivering on the stand hour after hour on a winter day, and will feel something of respect mingle with his pity for the thin, patient, serviceable screws. Horses that are lame, broken-winded, and vicious, pull the great bulk of all the weight that horses pull. And they get through their work somehow. Not long since, sitting on the box of a highland coach of most extraordinary shape, I travelled through Glenorchy and along Loch Awe side. The horses were wretched to look at; yet they took the coach at a good pace over that very up and down road, which was divided into very long stages. At last, amid a thick wood of dwarf oaks, the coach stopped to receive its final team. It was an extraordinary place for a coach to change horses. There was not a house near: the horses had walked three miles from their stable. They were by far the best team that had drawn the coach that day.



Four tall greys, nearly white with age ; but they looked well and went well, checking the coach stoutly as they went down the precipitous descents, and ascending the opposite hills at a tearing gallop. No doubt you could see various things amiss. They were blowing a little ; one or two were rather blind ; and all four a little stiff at starting. They were all screws. The dearest of them had not cost the coach-proprietor seven pounds ; yet how well they went over the eleven-mile stage into Inverary !

Now in like manner, a great part of the mental work that is done, is done by men who mentally are screws. The practical every-day work of life is done, and respectably done, by very silly, weak, prejudiced people. Mr. Carlyle has stated, that the population of Britain consists of ‘seventeen millions of people, mostly fools.’ I shall endeavour by and bye to make some reservation upon the great author’s sweeping statement ; but here it is enough to remark that even Mr. Carlyle would admit that the very great majority of these seventeen millions get very decently and creditably through the task which God sets them in this world. Let it be admitted that they are not so wise as they should be ; yet surely it may be admitted too, that they possess that in heart and head which makes them good enough for the rough and homely wear of life. No doubt they blow and occasionally stumble, they sometimes even bite and kick a little ; yet somehow they get the

coach along. For it is to be remembered that the essential characteristic of a screw is, that though unsound, it can yet by management be got to go through a great deal of work. The screw is not dead lame, nor only fit for the knacker ; it falls far short of the perfection of a horse, but still it *is* a horse, after all, and it can fulfil in some measure a horse's duty. You see, my friend, the moderation of my view. I do not say that men in general are mad, but only that men in general are screws. There is a little twist in their intellectual or moral nature ; there is something wanting or something wrong ; they are silly, conceited, egotistical, and the like ; yet decently equal to the work of this world. By judicious management you may get a great deal of worthy work out of the unsound minds of other men ; and out of your own unsound mind. But always remember that you have an imperfect and warped machine to get on with ; do not expect too much of it ; and be ready to humour it and yield to it a little. Just as a horse which is lame and broken-winded can yet by care and skill be made to get creditably through a wonderful amount of labour ; so may a man, low-spirited, foolish, prejudiced, ill-tempered, soured, and wretched, be enabled to turn off a great deal of work for which the world may be the better. A human being who is really very weak and silly, may write many pages which shall do good to his fellow-men, or which shall at the least amuse

them. But as you carefully drive an unsound horse ; walking him at first starting, not trotting him down hill, making play at parts of the road which suit him ; so you must manage many men, or they will break down, or bolt out of the path. Above all, so you must manage your own mind, whose weaknesses and wrong impulses you know best, if you would keep it cheerful, and keep it in working order. The showy, unsound horse can go well perhaps, but it must be shod with leather, otherwise it would be dead lame in a mile. And just in that same fashion we human beings, all more or less of screws mentally and morally, need all kinds of management, on the part of our friends and on our own part, or we should go all wrong. There is something truly fearful when we find that clearest-headed and soberest-hearted of men, the great Bishop Butler, telling us that all his life long he was struggling with horrible morbid suggestions, *devilish* is what he calls them, which, but for being constantly held in check with the sternest effort of his nature, would have driven him mad. Oh, let the uncertain, unsound, unfathomable human heart be wisely and tenderly driven ! And as there are things which with the unsound horse you dare not venture on at all, so with the fallen mind. You who know your own horse, know that you dare not trot him hard down hill. And you who know your own mind and heart, know that there are some things of which

you dare not think ; thoughts on which your only safety is resolutely to turn your back. The management needful *here* is the management of utter avoidance. How often we find poor creatures who have passed through years of anxiety and misery, and experienced savage and deliberate cruelty which it is best to forget, lashing themselves up to wrath and bitterness by brooding over these things, on which wisdom would bid them try to close their eyes for ever !

But not merely do screws daily draw cabs and stage-coaches : screws have won the Derby and the St. Leger. A noble-looking thorough-bred has galloped by the winning-post at Epsom at the rate of forty miles an hour, with a white bandage tightly tied round one of his forelegs : and thus publicly confessing its unsoundness, and testifying to its trainer's fears, it has beaten a score of steeds which were not screws, and borne off from them the blue ribbon of the turf. Yes, my reader : not only will skilful management succeed in making unsound animals do decently the humdrum and prosaic task-work of the equine world ; it will succeed occasionally in making unsound animals do in magnificent style the grandest things that horses ever do at all. Don't you see the analogy I mean to trace ? Even so, not merely do Mr. Carlyle's seventeen millions of fools get somehow through the petty work of our modern life, but minds which no man could warrant

sound and free from vice, turn off some of the noblest work that ever was done by mortal. Many of the grandest things ever done by human minds have been done by minds that were incurable screws. Think of the magnificent service done to humankind by James Watt. It is positively impossible to calculate what we all owe to the man that gave us the steam-engine. It is sober truth that the inscription in Westminster Abbey tells, when it speaks of him as among the 'best benefactors' of the race. Yet what an unsound organization that great man had! Mentally, what a screw! Through most of his life he suffered the deepest misery from desperate depression of spirits: he was always fancying that his mind was breaking down: he has himself recorded that he often thought of casting off, by suicide, the unendurable burden of life. And still, what work the rickety machine got through! With tearing headaches, with a sunken chest, with the least muscular of limbs, with the most melancholy of temperaments, worried and tormented by piracies of his great inventions, yet doing so much and doing it so nobly, was not James Watt like the lame race-horse that won the Derby? As for Byron, he was unquestionably a very great man; and as a poet, he is in his own school without a rival. Still, he was a screw. There was something morbid and unsound about his entire development. In many respects he was extremely silly. It was extremely

silly to take pains to represent that he was morally much worse than he really was. The greatest block-heads I know are distinguished by the same characteristic. Oh, empty-headed Noodle! who have more than once dropped hints in my presence as to the awful badness of your life, and the unhappy insight which your life has given you into the moral rottenness of society, don't do it again. I always thought you a contemptible fool: but next time I mean to tell you so. Wordsworth was a screw. Though one of the greatest of poets, he was dreadfully twisted by inordinate egotism and vanity: the result partly of original constitution, and partly of living a great deal too much alone in that damp and misty lake country. He was like a spavined horse. Coleridge, again, was a jibber. He never would pull in the team of life. There is something unsound in the mind of the man who fancies that because he is a genius, he need not support his wife and children. Even the sensible and exemplary Southey was a little unsound in the matter of a crotchety temper, needlessly ready to take offence. He was always quarrelling with his associates in the *Quarterly Review*: with the editor and the publisher. Perhaps you remember how on one occasion he wrought himself up into a fever of wrath with Mr. Murray, because that gentleman suggested a subject on which he wished Southey to write for the *Quarterly*, and begged him to *put his whole strength to it*, the subject being one which was

just then of great interest and importance. ‘Flagrant insolence,’ exclaimed Southey. ‘Think of the fellow bidding me put my whole strength to an article in his six-shilling *Review*!’ Now, reader, *there* you see the evil consequences of a man who is a little of a screw in point of temper, living in the country. Most reasonable men would never have discerned any insult in Mr. Murray’s request: but even if such a one had thought it a shade too authoritatively expressed, he would, if he had lived in town, gone out to the crowded street, gone down to his club, and in half an hour have entirely forgotten the little disagreeable impression. But a touchy man, dwelling in the country, gets the irritative letter by the morning’s post, is worried by it all the forenoon, and goes out and broods on the offence through all his solitary afternoon walk—a walk in which he does not see a face, perhaps, and certainly does not exchange a sentence with any human being whose presence is energetic enough to turn the current of thought into a healthier direction. And so, by the evening he has got the little offence into the point of view in which it looks most offensive: he is in a rage at being asked to do his best in writing anything for a six-shilling publication. Why on earth not do so? Is not the mind unsoundly sensitive that finds an offence in a request like that? We all know eminent writers at the present day, who put their whole strength to articles to be published in

periodicals that sell for half-a-crown, or even for a shilling.

You could not have warranted manly Samuel Johnson sound, on the points of prejudice and bigotry. There was something unsound in that unreasoning hatred of everything Scotch. Rousseau was altogether a screw. He was mentally lame, broken-winded, a shyder, a kicker, a jibber, a biter; he would do anything but run right on and do his duty. Shelley was a notorious screw. I should say, indeed, that his unsoundness passed the limit of practical sanity, and that on certain points he was unquestionably mad. You could not have warranted Keats sound. You could not deny the presence of a little perverse twist even in the noble mind and heart of the great Sir Charles Napier. The great Emperor Napoleon was cracky, if not cracked, on various points. There was unsoundness in his strange belief in his Fate. Neither Bacon nor Newton were entirely sound. But the mention of Newton suggests to me the single specimen of human kind who might stand even before *him*: and reminds me that Shakespeare was as sound as any mortal can be. Any defect in him extends no further than to his taste: and possibly where we should differ from him, he is right and we are wrong. You could not say that Shakespeare was mentally a screw. The noblest of all genius is sober and reasonable: it is among geniuses of the second order that you find something so warped, so

eccentric, so abnormal, as to come up to our idea of a screw. Sir Walter Scott was sound : save perhaps in the matter of his veneration for George IV., and of his desire to take rank as one of the country gentlemen of Roxburghshire.

To sum up : let it be admitted that very noble work has been turned off by minds in so far unhinged. It is not merely that great wits are to madness near allied, it is that great wits are sometimes actually in part mad. Madness is a matter of degree. The slightest departure from the normal and healthy action of the mind is an approximation to it. Every mind is a little unsound ; but you don't talk of insanity till the unsoundness becomes very glaring, and unfits for the duty of life. Just as almost every horse is a little lame : one leg steps a hairbreadth shorter than the other, or is a thought less muscular, or the hoof is a shade too sensitive : but you don't talk of lameness till the creature's head begins to go up and down, or till it plainly shrinks from putting its foot to the ground. Southey's wrath about the six-shilling *Review*, and his brooding on Murray's slight offence, was a step in the direction of marked delusion such as conveys a man to Hanwell or Morningside. And the sensitive, imaginative nature, which goes to the production of some of the human mind's best productions, is prone to such little deviations from that which is strictly sensible and right. You do not think, gay young

readers, what poor unhappy half-cracked creatures may have written the pages which thrill you or amuse you ; or painted the picture before which you pause so long. I know hardly any person who ever published anything ; but I have sometimes thought that I should like to see assembled in one chamber, on the first of any month, all the men and women who wrote all the articles in all the magazines for that month. Some of them doubtless would be very much like other people ; but many would certainly be very odd-looking and odd-tempered samples of human-kind. The history of some would be commonplace enough, but that of many would be very curious. A great many readers, I dare say, would like to stand in a gallery, and look at the queer individuals assembled below. Magazine articles, of course, are not (speaking generally) specimens of the highest order of literature ; but still, some experience, some thought, some observation, have gone to produce even them. And it is unquestionably out of deep sorrow, out of the travail of heart and nature, that the finest and noblest of all human thoughts have come.

As for the ordinary task-work of life, it must, beyond all question, be generally done by screws—that is, by folk whose mental organization is unsound on some point. Vain people, obstinate people, silly people, evil-foreboding people, touchy people, twaddling people, carry on the work-day world. Not

that it would be giving a fair account of them to describe them thus, and leave the impression that such are their essential characteristics. They *are* all that has been said ; but there is in most a good substratum of practical sense ; and they do fairly, or even remarkably well, the particular thing which it is their business in this life to do. When Mr. Carlyle said that the population of Britain consists of so many millions, ‘mostly fools,’ he conveys a quite wrong impression. No doubt there are some who are silly out and out ; who are always fools, and essentially fools. No doubt almost all, if you questioned them on great matters of which they have hardly thought, would express very foolish and absurd opinions. But then these absurd opinions are not the staple production of their minds. These are not a fair sample of their ordinary thoughts. Their ordinary thoughts are, in the main, sensible and reasonable, no doubt. Once upon a time, while a famous criminal trial was exciting vast interest, I heard a man in a railway-carriage, with looks of vast slyness and of special stores of information, tell several others that the judge and the counsel on each side had met quietly the evening before to arrange what the verdict should be ; and that though the trial would go on to its end to delude the public, still the whole thing was already settled. Now, my first impulse was to regard the man with no small interest, and to say to myself, There, unquestionably,

is a fool. But, on reflection, I felt I was wrong. No doubt he talked like a fool on this point. No doubt he expressed himself in terms worthy of an asylum for idiots. But the man may have been a very shrewd and sensible man in matters with which he was accustomed to deal: he was a horse-dealer, I believe, and I doubt not sharp enough at market; and the idiotic appearance he made was the result of his applying his understanding to a matter quite beyond his experience and out of his province. But a man is not properly to be called a fool, even though occasionally he says and does very foolish things, if the great preponderance of the things he says and does be reasonable. No doubt Mr. Carlyle is right in so far as this: that in almost every man there is an element of the fool. Almost all have a vein of folly running through them, and cropping out at the surface now and then. But in most men *that* is not the characteristic part of their nature. There is more of the sensible man than of the fool.

For the forms of unsoundness in those who are mental screws of the commonplace order; they are endless. You sometimes meet an intellectual defect like that of the conscientious blockhead James II., who thought that to differ from him in opinion was to doubt his word and call him a liar. An unsoundness common to all uneducated people is, that they cannot argue any question without getting into a rage and roaring at the top of their voice. This

unsoundness exists in a good many educated men too. A peculiar twist of some minds is this—that instead of maintaining by argument the thesis they are maintaining, which is probably that two and two make five, they branch off and begin to adduce arguments which do not go to prove *that*, but to prove that the man who maintains that two and two make four is a fool, or even a ruffian. Some good men are subject to this infirmity—that if you differ from them on any point whatever, they regard the fact of your differing from them as proof, not merely that you are intellectually stupid, but that you are morally depraved. Some really good men and women cannot let slip an opportunity of saying anything that may be disagreeable. And this is an evil that tends to perpetuate itself; for when Mr. Snarling comes and says to you something uncomplimentary of yourself or your near relations, instead of your doing what you ought to do, and pitying poor Snarling, and recommending him some wholesome medicine, you are strongly tempted to retort in kind: and thus you sink yourself to Snarling's level, and you carry on the quarrel. Your proper course is either to speak kindly to poor Snarling, or not to speak to him at all. There is something unsound about the man whom you never heard say a good word of any mortal, but whom you have heard say a great many bad words of a great many mortals. There is unsoundness, verging

on entire insanity, in the man who is always fancying that all about him are constantly plotting to thwart his plans and damage his character. There is unsoundness in the man who is constantly getting into furious altercations with his fellow passengers in steamers and railways, or getting into angry and lengthy correspondence with anybody in the newspapers or otherwise. There is unsoundness in the man who is ever telling you amazing stories which he fancies proves himself to be the bravest, cleverest, swiftest of mankind, but which (on his own showing) prove him to be a vapouring goose. There is unsoundness in the man or woman who turns green with envy as a handsome carriage drives past, and then says with awful bitterness that he or she would not enter such a shabby old conveyance. There is unsoundness in the mortal whose memory is full to repletion of contemptible little stories going to prove that all his neighbours are rogues or fools. There is unsoundness in the unfortunate persons who are always bursting into tears and bahooing out that nobody loves them. Nobody will, so long as they bahoo. Let them stop bahooing. There is unsoundness in the mental organization of the sneaky person who stays a few weeks in a family, and sets each member of it against all the rest by secretly repeating to each exaggerated and malicious accounts of what has been said as to him or her by the others. There is unsoundness in the perverse person who

resolutely does the opposite of what you wish and expect: who wont go the pleasure excursion you had arranged on his account, or partake of the dish which has been cooked for his special eating. There is unsoundness in the deluded and unamiable person who, by a grim, repellent, Pharisaic demeanour and address, excites in the mind of young persons gloomy and repulsive ideas of religion, which wiser and better folks find it very hard to rub away. 'Will my father be there?' said a little Scotch boy to some one who had been telling him of the Happiest Place in the universe, and recounting its joys. 'Yes,' was the reply. Said the little man, with prompt decision, 'Then I'll no gang!' He must have been a wretched screw of a Christian who left that impression on a young child's heart. There is unsoundness in the man who cannot listen to the praises of another man's merit without feeling as though this were something taken from himself. And it is amusing, though sad, to see how such folk take for granted in others the same petty enviousness which they feel in themselves. They will go to one writer, painter, preacher, and begin warmly to praise the doings of another man in the same vocation; and when I have seen the man addressed listen to and add to the praises with the hearty, self-forgetting sincerity of a generous mind, I have witnessed the bitter disappointment of the petty malignants at the failure of their poisoned dart. Generous honesty

quite baffles such. If their dart ever wounds you, reader, it is because you deserve that it should. There is unsoundness in the kindly, loveable man, whose opinions are preposterous, and whose conversation that of a jackass. But still, who can help loving the man, occasionally to be met, whose heart is right and whose talk is twaddle? Let me add, that I have met with one or two cases in which conscience was quite paralysed, but all the other intellectual faculties were right. Surely there is no more deplorable instance of the mental screw. You may find the notorious cheat who is never out of church, and who fancies himself a most creditable man. You will find the malicious tale-bearer and liar, who attends all the prayer meetings within her reach, and who thanks God (like an individual in former days) that she is so much better than other women.

In the case of commonplace screws, if they do their work well, it is for the most part in spite of their being screws. It is because they are sound in the main, in those portions of their mental constitution which their daily work calls into play; and because they are seldom required to do those things which their unsoundness makes them unfit to do. You know, if a horse never fell lame except when smartly trotted down a hill four miles long, you might say that for practical purposes *that* horse was never lame at all. For the single contingency to

which its powers are unequal would hardly ever occur. In like manner, if the mind of a tradesman is quite equal to the management of his business and the respectable training of his family, you may say that the tradesman's mind is for practical purposes a sound and good one; although if called to consider some important political question, such as that of the connexion of Church and State, his judgment might be purely idiotical. You see, he is hardly ever required to put his mind (so to speak) at a hill at which it would break down. I have walked a mile along the road with a respectable Scotch farmer, talking of country matters; and I have concluded that I had hardly ever conversed with a shrewder and more sensible man. But having accidentally chanced to speak of a certain complicated political question, I found that *quoad hoc* my friend's intellect was that of a baby. I had just come upon the four-mile descent which would knock up the horse which for ordinary work was sound.

Yes, reader, in the case of commonplace screws, if they do their work well, it is *in spite of* their being screws. But in the case of great geniuses who are screws, it is often *because of* their unsoundness that they do the fine things they do. It is the hectic beauty which his morbid mind cast upon his page, that made Byron the attractive and fascinating poet that he is to young and inexperienced minds. Had his views been sounder and his feeling healthier,

he might have been but a commonplace writer after all. In poetry, and in all imaginative writing, we look for beauty, not for sense; and we all know that what is properly disease and unsoundness sometimes adds to beauty. You know the delicate flush, the bright eyes, the long eyelashes, which we often see in a young girl on whom consumption is doing its work. You know the peachy complexion which often goes with undeveloped scrofula. And had Charles Lamb not been trembling on the verge of insanity, the *Essays of Elia* would have wanted great part of their strange, undefinable charm. Had Ford and Massinger led more regular lives and written more reasonable sentiments, what a *caput mortuum* their tragedies would be! Had Coleridge been a man of homely common-sense, he would never have written *Christabel*. I remember in my boyhood reading *The Ancient Mariner* to a hard-headed lawyer of no literary taste. He listened to the poem, and merely remarked that its author was a horrible fool.

There is no doubt that physical unsoundness often is a cause of mental excellence. Some of the best women on earth are the ugliest. Their ugliness cut them off from the enjoyment of the gaieties of life; they did not care to go to a ball-room and sit all the evening without once being asked to dance; and so they learned to devote themselves to better things. You have seen the pretty sister, a frivolous, silly

flirt ; the homely sister, quietly devoting herself to works of Christian charity. Ugly people, we often hear it said, cry up the beauties of the mind. It may be added, that ugly people possess a very large proportion of those beauties. And a great deal of the best intellectual work is done by men who are physically screws ; by men who are nearly blind, broken-winded, lame, and weakly. We all know what the Apostle Paul was physically ; we know too what the world owes to that dwarfish, bald, stammering man. I never in my life read anything more touching than the story of that poor weakly creature, Dr. George Wilson, the Professor of Technology in the University of Edinburgh. Poor weakly creature, only in a physical sense ; what a noble intellectual and moral nature dwelt within that slender frame ! You remember how admirably he did his work, though in a condition of almost ceaseless bodily weakness and suffering ; how he used to lecture often with a great blister on his chest ; how his lungs and his entire system were the very poorest that could just retain his soul. I never saw him ; but I have seen his portrait. You see the intellectual kindly face ; but it is but the weakly shadow of a physical man. But it was only physically that George Wilson was a poor type of humanity. What noble health and excellence there were in that noble mind and heart ! So amiable, so patient, so unaffectedly pious, so able and

industrious ; a beautiful example of a good, memorable and truly loveable man. Let us thank God for George Wilson : for his life and his example. Hundreds of poor souls ready to sink into morbid despair of ever doing anything good, will get fresh hope and heart from his story. It is well, indeed, that there have been some in whom the physical system equals the moral ; men like Christopher North and Sydney Smith—men in whom the play of the lungs was as good as the play of the imagination, and whose literal heart was as excellent as their metaphysical. We have all seen examples in which the noblest intellect and kindest disposition were happily blended with the stoutest limbs and the pleasantest face. And the sound mind in the sound body is doubtless the perfection of the human being. I have walked many miles and many hours over the heather, with one of the ablest men in Britain : a man whom at fourscore his country was able heartily to trust with perhaps the gravest charge which any British subject can undertake. And I have witnessed with great delight the combination of the keenest head and best heart, with physical strength and activity which quite knocked up men younger by forty years.

When I was reading Dr. Forbes Winslow's book, already named, a very painful idea was impressed upon me. Dr. Winslow gives us to understand that madness is for the most part a condition of most

awful suffering. I used to think that though there might be dreadful misery on the way to madness, yet once reason was fairly overthrown, the suffering was over. This appears not to be so. All the miserable depression of spirits, all the incapacity to banish distressing fears and suspicions, which paved the way to real insanity, exist in even intensified degree when insanity has actually been reached. The poor maniac fancies he is surrounded by burning fires, that he is encircled by writhing snakes, that he is in hell, tormented by devils; and we must remember that the misery caused by firmly believing a thing which does not exist, is precisely the same as that which would be occasioned to a sane person if the things imagined were facts. It seems, too, that many insane people are quite aware that they are insane, which of course aggravates what they have to endure. It must be a dreadful thing when the mind passes the point up to which it is still useful and serviceable, though unsound, and enters upon the stage of recognised insanity. It must be dreadful to feel that you are not quite yourself; that something is wrong; that you cannot discard suspicions and fears which still you are aware are foolish and groundless. This is a melancholy stage, and if it last long a very perilous one. Great anxiety, if continued for any length of time, is almost certain to lead to some measure of insanity. The man who night and day is never free from the thought of how

he is to pay his way, to maintain his children, is going mad. It is thoroughly evil when one single thought comes to take entire possession of the mind. It shows the brain is going. It is no wonder, my friendly reader, that so many men are mentally screws! There is something perfectly awful in reading what are the premonitory symptoms of true insanity. Read this, my friend, and be afraid of yourself. Here are what Dr. Winslow says indicates that insanity is drawing near. Have you never seen it? Have you never felt it?

The patient is irritable and fractious, peevish and pettish. He is morbidly anxious about trifles: slight ruffles on the surface, and trivial annoyances in the family circle or during the course of business, worry, flurry, tease and fret him, nothing satisfying or soothing his mind, and everything, to his distempered fancy, going wrong within the sacred precincts of domestic life. He is quick at fancying affronts, and greatly exaggerates the slightest and most trifling acts of supposed inattention. The least irregularity on the part of the domestics excites, angers, and vexes him. He is suspicious of and quarrels with his nearest relations, and mistrusts his best, kindest, and most faithful friends. While in this premonitory stage of mental derangement, bordering closely on an attack of acute insanity, he twists, distorts, misconceives, misconstrues, and perverts in a most singular manner every look, gesture, action, and word of those closely associated, and nearly related to him.

Considering that Dr. Winslow does really in that paragraph sketch the moral characteristics of at least a score of people known to every one of us, all this is alarming enough. And considering, too, how common a thing sleeplessness is among men who go through hard mental work, or who are pressed by

many cares and anxieties, it is even more alarming to read, that—

Wakefulness is one of the most constant concomitants of some types of incipient brain disease, and in many cases a *certain forerunner of insanity*. It is an admitted axiom in medicine that the brain cannot be in a healthy condition while a state of sleeplessness exists.


But I pass away from this part of my subject. I do not believe that it is good for either my readers or myself to look from a medical point of view at those defects or morbid manifestations in our mental organization which stamp us screws. We accept the fact, generally ; without going into details. It is a bad thing for a man to be always feeling his pulse after every little exertion, and fancying that its acceleration or irregularity indicates that something is wrong. Such a man is in the fair way to settled hypochondria. And I think it is even worse to be always watching closely the play of the mental machine, and thinking that this process or that emotion is not as it ought to be. Let a man work his mind fairly and moderately, and not worry himself as to its state. The mind can get no more morbid habit than that of continually watching itself for a stumble. Except in the case of metaphysicians, whose business it is to watch and analyse the doings of the mind, the mind ought to be like the stomach. You know that your stomach is right, because you never feel that you have one ; but the work intended for that organ is somehow done. And common folk

should know that they have minds, only by finding the ends fairly attained, which are intended to be attained by that most sensitive and ticklish piece of machinery.

I think that it is a piece of practical wisdom in driving the mental screw, to be careful how you allow it to dwell too constantly upon any one topic. If you allow yourself to think too much of any subject, you will get a partial craze upon that ; you will come to vastly overrate its importance. You will make yourself uncomfortable about it. There once was a man who mused long upon the notorious fact that almost all human beings stoop considerably. Few hold themselves as upright as they ought. And this notion took such hold upon the poor man's mind, that, waking or sleeping, he could not get rid of it ; and he published volume after volume to prove the vast extent of the evils which come of this bad habit of stooping, and to show that to get fairly rid of this bad habit would be the regeneration of the human race, physically and morally. We know how authors exaggerate the claims of their subject ; and I can quite imagine a very earnest man feeling afraid to think too much and long about any existing evil, for fear it should greaten on his view into a thing so large and pernicious, that he should be constrained to give all his life to wrestling with that one thing, and attach to it an importance which would make

his neighbours think him a monomaniac. If you think long and deeply upon any subject, it grows in apparent magnitude and weight ; if you think of it too long, it may grow big enough to exclude the thought of all things besides. If it be an existing and prevalent evil you are thinking of, you may come to fancy that if that one thing were done away, it would be well with the human race : all evil would go with it. I can conceive the process by which, without mania, without anything worse than the workable unsoundness of the practically sound mind, one might come to think as the man who wrote against stooping thought. For myself, I feel the force of this law so deeply, that there are certain evils of which I am afraid to think much, for fear I should come to be able to think of nothing else and nothing more. I remember, when I was a boy, there was a man in London who constantly advertised himself in the newspapers as the *Inventor of the only Rational System of Writing in the Universe*. His system was, I believe, to move in writing, not the fingers merely, but the entire arm from the shoulder. This may be an improvement perhaps : and that man had brooded over the mischiefs of moving the fingers in writing till these mischiefs shut out the view of the rest of creation, or at least till he saw nothing but irrationality in writing otherwise. All the millions who wrote by the fingers were cracked. The writing-master, in short, though possibly a reasonable

man on other subjects, was certainly unsound upon this. You may allow yourself to speculate on the chance of being bitten by a mad dog, or of being maimed by a railway accident, till you grow morbid on these points. If you live in the country, you may give in to the idea that your house will be broken into at night by burglars, till, every time you wake in the dark hours, you may fancy you hear the centre-bit at work boring through the window-shutters downstairs. A very clever woman once told me, that for a year she yielded so much to the fear that she had left a spark behind her in any room into which she had gone with a lighted candle, which spark would set the house on fire, that she could not be easy till she had groped her way back in the dark to see that things were right. Now, ye readers whose minds must be carefully driven (I mean all the readers who will ever see this page), don't give in to these fancies. As you would carefully train your horse to pass the corner he always shies at, so break your mind of this bad habit. And in breaking your mind of the smallest bad habit, I would counsel you to resort to the same kindly Helper whose aid you would ask in breaking your mind of the greatest and worst. It is not a small matter, the existence in the mind of any tendency or characteristic which is unsound. We know what lies in that direction. You are like the railway-train, which, with breaks unapplied, is stealing the first



yard down the incline at the rate of a mile in two hours ; but if that train be not pulled up, in ten minutes it may be tearing down to destruction at sixty miles an hour.

I have said that almost every human being is mentally a screw ; that all have some intellectual peculiarity, some moral twist, away from the normal standard of rightness. Let it be added, that it is little wonder that the fact should be as it is. I do not think merely of a certain unhappy warping, of an old original wrench, which human nature long ago received, and from which it never has recovered. I am not writing as a theologian ; and so I do not suggest the grave consideration that human nature, being fallen, need not be expected to be the right-working machinery that it may have been before it fell. But I may at least say, look how most people are educated ; consider the kind of training they get, and the incompetent hands that train them : what chance have they of being anything but screws ? Ah, my reader, if horses were broken by people as unfit for their work as most of the people who form human minds, there would not be a horse in the world that would not be dead lame. You do not trust your thorough-bred colt, hitherto unhandled, to any one who is not understood to have a thorough knowledge of the characteristics and education of horses. But in numberless instances, even in the better classes of society, a thing which

needs to be guarded against a thousand wrong tendencies, and trained up to a thousand right things from which it is ready to shrink, the most sensitive and complicated thing in nature, the human soul, is left to have its character formed by hands as hopelessly unfit for the task as the Lord Chancellor is to prepare the winner of the next St. Leger. You find parents and guardians of children systematically following a course of treatment calculated to bring out the very worst tendencies of mind and heart that are latent in the little things given to their care. If a young horse has a tendency to shy, how carefully the trainer seeks to win him away from the habit! But if a poor little boy has a hasty temper, you may find his mother taking the greatest pains to irritate that temper. If the little fellow have some physical or mental defect, you have seen parents who never miss an opportunity of throwing it in the boy's face; parents who seem to exult in the thought that they know the place where a touch will always cause to wince—the sensitive, unprotected point where the dart of malignity will never fail to get home. If a child has said or done some wrong or foolish thing, you will find parents who are constantly raking up the remembrance of it, for the pure pleasure of giving pain. Even so would a kindly man, who knows that his horse has just come down and cut himself, take pains whenever he came to a bit of road freshly macadamized to bring down the poor.

horse on the sharp stones again with his bleeding knees. And even where you do not find positive malignity in those entrusted with the training of human minds, you find hopeless incompetency exhibited in many other ways ; outrageous silliness and vanity, want of honesty, and utter want of sense. I say it deliberately, instead of wondering that most minds are such screws, I wonder with indescribable surprise that they are not a thousand times worse. For they are like trees pruned and trained into ugliness and barrenness. They are like horses carefully tutored to shy, kick, rear, and bite. It says something hopeful as to what may yet be made of human beings, that most of them are no worse than they are. Some parents, fancying too that they are educating their children on Christian principles, educate them in such fashion that the only wonder is that the children do not end at the gallows.

Let us recognise the fact in all our treatment of others, that we have to deal with screws. Let us not think, as some do, that by ignoring a fact you make it cease to be a fact. I have seen a man pulling his lame horse up tight, and flicking it with his whip, and trying to drive it as if it were not lame. Now, that wont do. The poor horse makes a desperate effort, and runs a step or two as if sound. But in a little the heavy head falls upon the bit at

each step, and perhaps the creature comes down bodily with a tremendous smash. If it were only his idiotic master that was smashed, I should not mind. So have I seen parents refusing to see or allow for the peculiarities of their children, insisting on driving the poor screw as though it were perfect in wind and limb. So have I seen people refusing to see or allow for the peculiarities of those around them ; ignoring the depressed spirits, the unhappy twist, the luckless perversity of temper, in a servant, an acquaintance, a friend, which, rightly managed, would still leave them most serviceable screws ; but which, determinedly ignored, will land in uselessness and misery. I believe there are people who (in a moral sense), if they have a crooked stick, fancy that by using it as if it were straight, it will become straight. If you have got a rifle that sends its ball somewhat to the left side, you (if you are not a fool) allow for that in shooting. 'If you have a friend of sterling value, but of crotchety temper, you (if you are not a fool) allow for that. If you have a child who is weak, desponding, and early old, you (if you are not a hopeless idiot) remember that, and allow for it, and try to make the best of it. But if you be an idiot, you will think it deep diplomacy, and adamantine firmness, and wisdom beyond Solomon's, to shut your eyes to the taste of facts ; to tug sharply the poor screw's mouth, to lash him violently, to drive him as though he were sound. Probably you

will come to a smash : alas ! that the smash will probably include more than you.

Not, reader, that all human beings thus idiotically ignore the fact that it is with screws they have to deal. It is very touching to see, as we sometimes see, people trying to make the best of awful screws. You are quite pleased if your lame horse trots four or five miles without showing very gross unsoundness, though of course this is but a poor achievement. And even so, I have been touched to see the child quite happy at having coaxed a graceless father to come for once to church ; and the wife quite happy when the blackguard bully, her husband, for once evinces a little kindness. It was not much they did, you see : but remember what wretched screws did it, and be thankful if they do even that little. I have heard a mother repeat, with a pathetic pride, a connected sentence said by her idiot boy. You remember how delighted Miss Trotwood was, in Mr. Dickens's beautiful story, with Mr. Dick's good sense, when he said something which in anybody else would have been rather silly. But Mr. Dick, you see, was just out of the Asylum, and no more. How pleased you are to find a relation, who is a terrific fool, merely behaving like anybody else !

Yes : there is a good deal of practical resignation in this world. We get reconciled to having and to being screws. We grow reconciled to the fact that

• •

our possessions, our relations, our friends, are very far indeed from being what we could wish. We grow reconciled to the fact, and we try to make the best of it, that we ourselves are screws: that in temper, in judgment, in talent, in tact, we are a thousand miles short of being what we ought; and that we can hope for little more than decently, quietly, sometimes wearily and sadly, to plod along the path in life which God in his kindness and wisdom has set us. We come to look with interest, but without a vestige of envy, at those who are cleverer and better off than ourselves. A great many good people are so accustomed to things going against them, that they are rather startled when things go as they could have desired: they can stand disappointment, but success puts them out, it is so unwonted a thing. The lame horse, the battered old gig—they feel at home with these; but they would be confused if presented with my friend Smith's drag, with its beautiful steeds, all but thorough-bred, and perfectly sound. To struggle on with a small income, manifold worries, and lowly estimation—to these things they have quietly reconciled themselves. But give them wealth, and peace, and fame (if these things can be combined), and they would hardly know what to do. Yesterday I walked up a very long flight of steps in a very poor part of the most beautiful city in Britain. Just before me, a feeble old woman, bent down apparently by eighty years,

was slowly ascending. She had a very large bundle on her back, and she supported herself by a short stick in her withered, trembling hand. If it had been in the country, I should most assuredly have carried up the poor creature's bundle for her; but I am sorry to say I had not moral courage to offer to do so in town: for a parson with a great sackcloth bundle on his back would be greeted in that district with depreciatory observations. But I kept close by her, to help her if she fell; and when I got to the top of the steps I passed her and went on. I looked sharply at the poor old face in passing; I see it yet. I see the look of cowed, patient, quiet, hopeless submission: I saw she had quite reconciled her mind to bearing her heavy burden, and to the far heavier load of years, and infirmities, and poverty, she was bearing too. She had accepted those for her portion in this life. She looked for nothing better. She was like the man whose horse has been broken-winded and lame so long, that he is come almost to think that every horse is a screw. I see yet the quiet, wearied, surprised look she cast up at me as I passed: a look merely of surprise to see an entire coat in a place where my fellow-creatures (every one deserving as much as me) for the most part wear rags. I do not think she even wished to possess an equally entire garment: she looked at it with interest merely as the possession of some one else. She did not *even herself* (as we Scotch say) to anything better

than the rags she had worn so long. Long experience had subdued her to what she is.

But short experience does so too. We early learn to be content with screws, and to make the best of imperfect means. As I have been writing that last paragraph, I have been listening to a colloquy outside my study door, which is partly open. The parties engaged in the discussion were a certain little girl of five years old, and her nurse. The little girl is going out to spend the day at the house of a little companion ; and she is going to take her doll with her. I heard various sentences not quite distinctly, which conveyed to me a general impression of perplexity ; and at length, in a cheerful, decided voice, the little girl said, ‘ *The people will never know it has got no legs !* ’ The doll, you see, was unsound. Accidents had brought it to an imperfect state. But that wise little girl had done what you and I, my reader, must try to do very frequently : she had made up her mind to make the best of a screw.

I learn a lesson, as I close my essay, from the old woman of eighty, and the little girl of five. Let us seek to reconcile our minds both to possessing screws, and (harder still) to being screws. Let us make the best of our imperfect possessions, and of our imperfect selves. Let us remember that a great deal of good can be done by means which fall very far short of perfection : that our moderate abilities, honestly and wisely husbanded and directed, may

serve valuable ends in this world before we quit it, —ends which may remain after we are gone. I do not suppose that judicious critics, in pointing out an author's faults, mean that he ought to stop writing altogether. There are hopeless cases in which he certainly ought : cases in which the steed passes being a screw, and is fit only for the hounds. But in most instances the critic would be quite wrong, if he argued that because his author has many flaws and defects, he should write no more. With all its errors, what he writes may be much better than nothing ; as the serviceable screw is better than no horse at all. And if the critic's purpose is merely to show the author that the author is a screw —why, if the author have any sense at all, he knows that already. He does not claim to be wiser than other men ; and still less to be better : yet he may try to do his best. With many defects and errors, still fair work may be turned off. I will not forget the lame horses that took the coach so well to Inverary. And I remember certain words in which one who is all but the greatest English poet declared that under the heavy visitation of God he would do his utmost still. Here is the resolution of a noble screw:—

I argue not
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope ; but still bear up and steer
Right onward !

CHAPTER III.

CONCERNING SOLITARY DAYS.

LET me look back, this New Year's time, over nine years. Let me try to revive again the pervading atmosphere of the days when I used to live entirely alone. All days crush up into very little in the perspective. The months and years which were long as they passed over, are but a hand-breadth in remembrance. Five or ten years may be packed away into a very little corner in your mind ; and in the case of a man brought up from childhood in a large family, who spends no more than three or four years alone before he again sees a household beginning to surround him, I think those lonely years seem especially short in the retrospect. Yet possibly in these he may have done some of the best work of his life ; and possibly none, of all the years he has seen, have produced so great an impression on his character and on his temperament. And the impression left may be most diverse in nature. I have known a man remarkably gentle,

kind, and sympathetic; always anxious to say a pleasant and encouraging word; discerning by a wonderful intuition whenever he had presented a view or made a remark that had caused pain to the most sensitive, and eager to efface the painful feeling; and I have thought that in all this I could trace the result of his having lived entirely alone for many years. I have known a man insufferably arrogant, conceited, and self-opinionated; another morbidly suspicious and ever nervously anxious; another conspicuously devoid of common sense; and in each of these I have thought I could trace the result of a lonely life. But indeed it depends so entirely on the nature of the material subjected to the mill what the result turned off shall be, that it is hard to say of any human being what shall be the effect produced upon his character by almost any discipline you can think of. And a solitary life may make a man either thoughtful or vacant, either humble or conceited, either sympathetic or selfish, either frank or shrinkingly shy.

Great numbers of educated people in this country live solitary lives. And by a solitary life I do not mean a life in a remote district of country with hardly a neighbour near, but with your house well filled and noisy with children's voices. By a solitary life, I mean a life in which, day after day and week after week, you rise in the morning in a silent dwelling, in which, save servants, there are none but

58 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

yourself; in which you sit down to breakfast by yourself, perhaps set yourself to your day's work all alone, then dine by yourself, and spend the evening by yourself. Barristers living in chambers in some cases do this; young lads living in lodgings, young clergymen in country parsonages, old bachelors in handsome town houses and beautiful country mansions, old maids in quiet streets of country towns, old ladies once the centre of cheerful families, but whose husband and children are gone—even dukes in palaces and castles, amid a lonely splendour which must, one would think, seem dreary and ghastly. But you know, my reader, we sympathize the most completely with that which we have ourselves experienced. And when I hear people talk of a solitary life, the picture called up before me is that of a young man who has always lived as one of a household considerable in numbers, who gets a living in the Church, and who, having no sister to keep house for him, goes to it to live quite alone. How many of my friends have done precisely that! Was it not a curious mode of life? A thing is not made commonplace to your own feeling by the fact that hundreds or thousands of human beings have experienced the very same. And although fifty Smiths have done it (all very clever fellows), and fifty Robinsons have done it (all very commonplace and ordinary fellows), one does not feel a bit the less interest in recurring to that experience which, hack-

neyed as it may be, is to you of greater interest than all other experience, in that it is your own. Draw up a thousand men in a row, all dressed in the same dark-green uniform of the riflemen; and I do not think that their number, or their likeness to one another, will cause any but the most unthinking to forget that each is an individual man as much as if he stood alone in the desert; that each has his own ties, cares, and character; and that possibly each, like to all the rest as he may appear to others, is to several hearts, or perhaps to one only, the one man of all mankind.

Most clergymen whom I have known divide their day very much in the same fashion. After breakfast they go into their study and write their sermon for two or three hours; then they go out and visit their sick or make other calls of duty for several hours. If they have a large parish, they probably came to it with the resolution that before dinner they should always have an hour's smart walk at least; but they soon find that duty encroaches on that hour, and finally eats it entirely up, and their duty calls are continued till it is time to return home to dinner. Don't you remember, my friend, how short a time that lonely meal lasted, and how very far from jovial the feast was? As for me, that I might rest my eyes from reading between dinner and tea (a thing much to be desired in the case of every scholar), I hardly ever failed, save for a few

60 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

weeks of midwinter, to go out in the twilight and have a walk—a solitary and very slow walk. My hours, you see, were highly unfashionable. I walked from half-past five to half-past six: *that* was my after-dinner walk. It was always the same. It looks somewhat dismal to recal. Do you ever find, in looking back at some great trial or mortification you have passed through, that you are pitying yourself as if you were another person? I do not mean to say that those walks were a trial. On the contrary, they were always an enjoyment—a subdued quiet enjoyment, as are the enjoyments of solitary folk. Still, now looking back, it seems to me as if I were watching some one else going out in the cold February twilight, and walking from half-past five to half-past six. I think I see a human being, wearing a very thick and rough great-coat, got for these walks, and never worn on any other occasion, walking very slowly, bearing an extremely thick oak walking-stick (I have it yet) by the shore of the bleak grey sea. Only on the beach did I ever bear that stick; and by many touches of the sand it gradually wore down till it became too short for use. I see the human being issuing from the door of a little parsonage (not the one where there are magnificent beeches and rich evergreens and climbing roses), and always waiting at the door for him there was a friendly dog, a terrier, with very short legs and a very long back, and shaggy to that

degree that at a cursory glance it was difficult to decide which was his head and which his tail. Ah, poor old dog, you are grown very stiff and lazy now, and time has not mellowed your temper. Even then it was somewhat doubtful. Not that you ever offered to bite me ; but it was most unlucky, and it looked most invidious, that occasion when you rushed out of the gate and severely tore the garments of the dissenting minister ! But he was a worthy man : and I trust that he never supposed that upon that day you acted by my instigation. You were very active then ; and so few faces did you see (though a considerable town was within a few hundred yards), that the appearance of one made you rush about and bark tremendously. Cross a field, pass through a hedgerow of very scrubby and stunted trees, cross a railway by a path on the level, go on by a dirty track on its further side ; and you come upon the seashore. It is a level, sandy beach ; and for a mile or two inland the ground is level, and the soil ungenial. There are sandy downs, thinly covered with coarse grass. Trees will hardly grow ; the few trees there are, are cut down by the salt winds from the Atlantic. The land view, in a raw twilight of early spring, is dreary beyond description ; but looking across the sea, there is a magnificent view of mountain peaks. And if you turn in another direction, and look along the shore, you will see a fine hill rising from the sea

62 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

and running inland, at whose base there flows a beautiful river, which pilgrims come hundreds of miles to visit. How often, O sandy beach, have these feet walked slowly along you ! And in these years of such walks, I did not meet or see in all six human beings. A good many years have passed since I saw that dismal beach last ; I dare say it would look very strange now. The only excitement of those walks consisted in sending the dog into the sea, and in making him run after stones. How tremendously he ran ; what tiger-like bounds he made, as he overtook the missile ! Just such walks, my friends, many of you have taken. *Homines estis.* And then you have walked into your dwelling again, walked into your study, had tea in solitude, spent the evening alone in reading and writing. You have got on in life, let it be hoped ; but you remember well the aspect and arrangement of the room ; you remember where stood tables, chairs, candles ; you remember the pattern of the grate, often vacantly studied. I think every one must look back with great interest upon such days. Life was in great measure before you, what you might do with it. For anything you knew then, you might be a great genius ; whereas if the world, even ten years later, has not yet recognised you as a great genius, it is all but certain that it never will recognise you as such at all. And through those long winter evenings, often prolonged far into the night, not only did you

Concerning Solitary Days. 63

muse on many problems, social, philosophical, and religious, but you pictured out, I dare say, your future life, and thought of many things which you hoped to do and to be.

A very subdued mood of thought and feeling, I think, creeps gradually over a man living such a solitary life. I mean a man who has been accustomed to a house with many inmates. There is something odd in the look of an apartment in which hardly a word is ever spoken. If you speak while by yourself, it is in a very low tone ; and though you may smile, I don't think any sane man could often laugh heartily while by himself. Think of a life in which, while at home, there is no talking and no laughing. Why, one distinctive characteristic of rational man is cut off when laughing ceases. Man is the only living creature that laughs with the sense of enjoyment. I have heard, indeed, of the laughing hyena ; but my information respecting it is mainly drawn from Shakespeare, who was rather a great philosopher and poet than a great naturalist. 'I will laugh like a hyen,' says that great man ; and as these words are spoken as a threat, I apprehend the laughter in question is of an unpleasant and unmirthful character. But to return from such deep thoughts, let it be repeated, that the entire mood of the solitary man is likely to be a sobered and subdued one. Even if hopeful and content, he will never be in high spirits. The highest degree in the scale he will

64 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

ever reach, may be that of quiet lightheartedness ; and *that* will come seldom. Jollity, or exhilaration, is entirely a social thing. I do not believe that even Sydney Smith could have got into one of his rollicking veins when alone. He enjoyed his own jokes, and laughed at them with extraordinary zest ; but he enjoyed them because he thought others were enjoying them too. Why, you would be terrified that your friend's mind was going, if before entering his room you heard such a peal of merriment from within, as would seem a most natural thing were two or three cheerful companions together. And gradually that chastened, subdued stage comes, in which a man can sit for half-an-hour before the fire as motionless as marble ; even a man who in the society of others is in ceaseless movement. It is an odd feeling, when you find that you yourself, once the most restless of living creatures, have come to this. I dare say Robinson Crusoe often sat for two or three hours together in his cave, without stirring hand or foot. The vital principle grows weak when isolated. You must have a number of embers together to make a warm fire ; separate them, and they will soon go out and grow cold. And even so, to have brisk, conscious, vigorous life, you must have a number of lives together. They keep each other warm. They encourage and support each other. I dare say the solitary man, sitting at the close of a long evening by his lonely fireside, has sometimes

Concerning Solitary Days. 65

felt as though the flame of life had sunk so low that a very little thing would be enough to put it out altogether. From the motionless limbs, from the unstrung hands, it seemed as though vitality had ebbed away, and barely kept its home in the feeble heart. At such a time, some sudden blow, some not very violent shock, would suffice to quench the spark for ever. Reading the accounts in the newspapers of the cold, hunger, and misery which our poor soldiers suffered in the Crimea, have you not thought at such a time that a hundredth part of *that* would have been enough to extinguish *you*? Have you not wondered at the tenacity of material life, and at the desperate grasp with which even the most wretched cling to it? Is it worth the beggar's while in the snow-storm, to struggle on through the drifting heaps towards the town eight miles off, where he may find a morsel of food to half-appease his hunger, and a stone stair to sleep in during the night? Have not you thought, in hours when you were conscious of that shrinking of life into its smallest compass—that retirement of it from the confines of its territory, of which we have been thinking—that in that beggar's place you would keep up the fight no longer, but creep into some quiet corner, and there lay yourself down and sleep away into forgetfulness? I do not say that the feeling is to be approved, or that it can in any degree bear being reasoned upon; but I ask such readers as

66 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

have led solitary lives, whether they have not sometimes felt it? It is but the subdued feeling which comes of loneliness, carried out to its last development. It is the highest degree of that influence which manifests itself in slow steps, in subdued tones of voice, in motionless musings beside the fire.

Another consequence of a lonely life in the case of many men, is an extreme sensitiveness to impressions from external nature. In the absence of other companions of a more energetic character, the scenes amid which you live produce an effect on you which they would fail to produce if you were surrounded by human friends. It is the rule in nature, that the stronger impression makes you unconscious of the weaker. If you had charged with the Six Hundred, you would not have remarked during the charge that one of your sleeves was too tight. Perhaps in your boyhood, a companion of a turn at once thoughtful and jocular, offered to pull a hair out of your head without your feeling it. And this he accomplished, by taking hold of the doomed hair, and then giving you a knock on the head that brought tears to your eyes. For, in the more vivid sensation of that knock you never felt the little twitch of the hair as it quitted its hold. Yes, the stronger impression makes you unaware of the weaker. And the impression produced either upon thought or feeling by outward scenes, is so much

weaker than that produced by the companionship of our kind, that in the presence of the latter influence, the former remains unfelt, even by men upon whom it would tell powerfully in the absence of another. And so it is upon the lonely man that skies and mountains, woods and fields and rivers, tell with their full effect ; it is to him that they become a part of life ; it is in him that they make the inner shade or sunshine, and originate and direct the processes of the intellect. You go out to take a walk with a friend : you get into a conversation that interests and engrosses you. And thus engrossed, you hardly remark the hedges between which you walk, or the soft outline of distant summer hills. After the first half-mile, you are proof against the influence of the dull December sky, or the still October woods. But when you go out for your solitary walk, unless your mind be very much preoccupied indeed, your feeling and mood are at the will of external nature. And after a few hundred yards, unless the matter which was in your mind at starting be of a very worrying and painful character, you begin gradually to take your tone from the sky above you, and the ground on which you tread. You hear the birds, which, walking with a sympathetic companion, you would never have noticed. You feel the whole spirit of the scene, whether cheerful or gloomy, gently pervading you, and sinking into your heart. I do not know how far all this, continued through months or years

68 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

of comparative loneliness, may permanently affect character ; we can stand a great deal of kneading without being lastingly affected, either for better or worse ; but there can be no question at all, that in a solitary life nature rises into a real companion, producing upon our present mood a real effect. As more articulate and louder voices die away upon our ear, we begin to hear the whisper of trees, the murmur of brooks, the song of birds, with a distinctness and a meaning not known before.

The influence of nature on most minds is likely to be a healthful one ; still, it is not desirable to allow that influence to become too strong. And there is a further influence which is felt in a solitary life, which ought never to be permitted to gain the upper hand. I mean the influence of our own mental moods. It is not expedient to lead too subjective a life. We look at all things, doubtless, through our own atmosphere ; our eyes, to a great extent, *make* the world they see. And no doubt, too, it is the sunshine within the breast that has most power to brighten : and the thing that can do most to darken is the shadow there. Still, it is not fit that these mental moods should be permitted to arise mainly through the mind's own working. It is not fit that a man should watch his mental moods as he marks the weather ; and be always chronicling that on such a day and such another he was in high or low spirits, he was kindly-disposed or snappish,


•

as the case may be. The more stirring influence of intercourse with others, renders men comparatively heedless of the ups and downs of their own feelings ; change of scenes and faces, conversation, business engagements, may make the day a lively or a depressed one, though they rose at morning with a tendency to just the opposite thing. But the solitary man is apt to look too much inward ; and to attach undue importance to the fancies and emotions which arise spontaneously within his own breast ; many of them in great measure the result of material causes. And as it is not a healthy thing for a man to be always feeling his pulse, and fearing that it shows something amiss ; it is not a healthy thing to follow the analogous course as regards our immaterial health and development. And I cannot but regard those religious biographies which we sometimes read, in which worthy people of little strength of character record particularly from day to day all the shifting moods and fancies of their minds as regards their religious concerns, as calculated to do a great deal of mischief. It is founded upon a quite mistaken notion of the spirit of true Christianity, that a human being should be ever watching the play of his mind, as one might watch the rise and fall of the barometer ; and recording phases of thought and feeling which it is easy to see are in some cases, and in some degree, at least, the result of change of temperature, of dyspepsia, of

70 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

deranged circulation of the blood, as though these were the unquestionable effects of spiritual influence, either supernal or infernal. Let us try, in the matter of these most solemn of all interests, to look more to great truths and facts which exist quite independently of the impression they may for the time produce upon us ; and less to our own fanciful or morbid frames and feelings.

It cannot be denied that, in some respects, most men are better men alone than in the society of their fellows. They are kinder-hearted ; more thoughtful ; more pious. I have heard a man say that he always acted and felt a great deal more under the influence of religious principle while living in a house all by himself for weeks and months, than he did when the house was filled by a family. Of course this is not saying much for the steadfastness of a man's Christian principle. It is as much as to say that he feels less likely to go wrong when he is not tempted to go wrong. It is as though you said in praise of a horse, that he never shies when there is nothing to shy at. No doubt, when there are no little vexatious realities to worry you, you will not be worried by them. And little vexatious realities are doubtless a trial of temper and of principle. Living alone, your nerves are not jarred by discordant voices ; you are to a great degree free from annoying interruptions ; and if you be of an



orderly turn of mind, you are not put about by seeing things around you in untidy confusion. You do not find leaves torn out of books ; nor carpets strewn with fragments of biscuits ; nor mantelpieces getting heaped with accumulated rubbish. Sawdust, escaped from maimed dolls, is never sprinkled upon your table-covers ; nor ink poured over your sermons ; nor leaves from these compositions cut up for patterns for dolls' dresses. There is an audible quiet which pervades the house, which is favourable to thought. The first evenings, indeed, which you spent alone in it, were almost awful for their stillness ; but that sort of nervous feeling soon wears off. And then you have no more than the quiet in which the mind's best work must be done, in the case of average men.

And there can be little doubt, that when you gird up the mind, and put it to its utmost stretch, it is best that you should be alone. Even when the studious man comes to have a wife and children, he finds it needful that he should have his chamber to which he may retire when he is to grapple with his task of head-work ; and he finds it needful, as a general rule, to suffer no one to enter that chamber while he is at work. It is not without meaning that this solitary chamber is called a *study*: the word reminds us that hard mental labour must generally be gone through when we are alone. Any interruption by others breaks the train of thought ;

72 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

and the broken end may never be caught again. You remember how Maturin, the dramatist, when he felt himself getting into the full tide of composition, used to stick a wafer on his forehead, to signify to any member of his family who might enter his room, that he must not on any account be spoken to. You remember the significant arrangement of Sir Walter's library, or rather study, at Abbotsford ; it contained *one chair*, and no more. Yes, the mind's best work, at the rate of writing, must be done alone. At the speed of talking, the case is otherwise. The presence of others will then stimulate the mind to do its best ; I mean to do the best it can do *at that rate of speed*. Talking with a clever man, on a subject which interests you, your mind sometimes produces material which is (for you) so good, that you are truly surprised at it. And a barrister, addressing a judge or a jury, has to do hard mental work, to keep all his wits awake, to strain his intellect to the top of its bent, in the presence of many ; but at the rate of speed at which he does this, he does it all the better for their presence. So with an extempore preacher. The eager attention of some hundreds of his fellow-creatures spurs him on (if he be mentally and physically in good trim) to do perhaps the very best he ever does. I have heard more than two or three clergymen who preach extempore (that is, who trust to the moment for the words entirely, for the illustration mainly, and for the thought in some degree),

declare that they have sometimes felt quite astonished at the fluency with which they were able to express their thoughts, and at the freshness and fulness with which thoughts crowded upon them, while actually addressing a great assemblage of people. Of course, such extemporaneous speaking is an uncertain thing. It is a hit or a miss. A little physical or mental derangement, and the extempore speaker gets on lamely enough ; he flounders, stammers, perhaps breaks down entirely. But still, I hold that though the extempore speaker may think and say that his mind often produces extempore the best material it ever produces, it is in truth only the best material which it can produce *at the rate of speaking* : and though the freshly manufactured article, warm from the mind that makes it, may interest and impress at the moment, we all know how loose, wordy, and unsymmetrical such a composition always is ; and it is unquestionable that the very best product of the human soul must be turned off, not at the rate of speaking, but at the much slower rate of writing : yes, and oftentimes of writing with many pauses between the sentences, and long musing over individual phrases and words. Could Mr. Tennyson have spoken off in half-an-hour any one of the *Idylls of the King* ? Could he have said in three minutes any one of the sections of *In Memoriam* ? And I am not thinking of the mechanical difficulty of composition in verse : I am thinking of the simple product

74 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

in thought. Could Bacon have extemporized at the pace of talking, one of his Essays? Or does not Ben Jonson sum up just those characteristics which extempore composition (even the best) entirely wants, when he tells us of Bacon that 'no man ever wrote more neatly, more pressly : nor suffered less emptiness, less idleness, in that he uttered?' I take it for granted, that the highest human composition is that which embodies most thought, experience, and feeling; and *that* must be produced slowly and alone.

And if a man's whole heart be in his work, whether it be to write a book, or to paint a picture, or to produce a poem, he will be content to make his life such as may tend to make him do his work best, even though that mode of life should not be the pleasantest in itself. He may say to himself, I would rather be a great poet than a very cheerful and happy man; and if to lead a very retired and lonely life be the likeliest discipline to make me a great poet, I shall submit to that discipline. You must pay a price in labour and self-denial to accomplish any great end. When Milton resolved to write something 'which men should not willingly let die,' he knew what it would cost him. It was to be 'by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life.' When Mr. Dickens wrote one of his Christmas Books, he shut himself up for six weeks to do it: he 'put his whole heart

into it, and came out again looking as haggard as a murderer.' There is a substratum of philosophic truth in Professor Aytoun's brilliant burlesque of *Firmilian*. That gentleman wanted to be a poet. And being persuaded that the only way to successfully describe tragic and awful feelings was to have actually felt them, he got into all kinds of scrapes of set purpose, that he might know what were the actual sensations of people in like circumstances. Wishing to know what are the emotions of a murderer, he goes and kills somebody. He finds, indeed, that feelings sought experimentally prove not to be the genuine article : still, you see the spirit of the true artist, content to make any sacrifice to attain perfection in his art. The highest excellence, indeed, in some one department of human exertion is not consistent with decent goodness in all : you dwarf the remaining faculties when you develop one to abnormal size and strength. Thus have men been great preachers, but uncommonly neglectful parents. Thus have men been great statesmen, but omitted to pay their tradesmen's bills. Thus men have been great moral and social reformers, whose own lives stood much in need of moral and social reformation. I should judge from a portrait I have seen of Mr. Thomas Sayers, the champion of England, that this eminent individual has attended to his physical to the neglect of his intellectual development. His face appeared deficient in intelligence, though his

76 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

body seemed abundant in muscle. And possibly it is better to seek to develop the entire nature—intellectual, moral, and physical—than to push one part of it into a prominence that stunts and kills the rest. It is better to be a complete *man* than to be essentially a poet, a statesman, a prize-fighter. It is better that a tree should be fairly grown all round, than that it should send out one tremendous branch to the south, and have only rotten twigs in every other direction ; better, even though that tremendous branch should be the very biggest that ever was seen. Such an inordinate growth in a single direction is truly morbid. It reminds one of the geese whose livers go to form that regal dainty, the *paté de foie gras*. By subjecting a goose to a certain manner of life, you dwarf its legs, wings, and general muscular development ; but you make its liver grow as large as itself. I have known human beings who practised on their mental powers a precisely analogous discipline. The power of calculating in figures, of writing poetry, of chess-playing, of preaching sermons, was tremendous ; but all their other faculties were like the legs and wings of the fattening goose.

Let us try to be entire human beings, round and complete ; and if we wish to be so, it is best not to live too much alone. The best that is in man's nature taken as a whole is brought out by the society of his kind. In one or two respects he may be better in solitude, but not as the complete man.

Concerning Solitary Days. 77

And more especially a good deal of the society of little children is much to be desired. You will be the better for having them about you, for listening to their stories, and watching their ways. They will sometimes interrupt you at your work, indeed, but their effect upon your moral development will be more valuable by a great deal than the pages you might have written in the time you spent with them. Read over the following verses, which are written by Longfellow. I do not expect that men who have no children of their own will appreciate them duly ; but they seem to me among the most pleasing and touching which that pleasing poet ever wrote. Miserable solitary beings, see what improving and softening influences you miss !

Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations
That is known as the Children's Hour.

I hear in the chamber above me
The patter of little feet,
The sound of a door that is opened,
And voices soft and sweet.

From my study I see in the lamplight,
Descending the broad hall-stair,
Grave Alice, and laughing Allegra,
And Edith with golden hair.

A whisper, and then a silence :
Yet I know by their merry eyes
They are plotting and planning together
To take me by surprise.

A sudden rush from the stairway,
A sudden raid from the hall !
By three doors left unguarded
They enter my castle wall !

They climb up into my turret,
O'er the arms and back of my chair ;
If I try to escape, they surround me ;
They seem to be everywhere.

They almost devour me with kisses,
Their arms about me entwine,
Till I think of the Bishop of Bingen
In his Mouse-Tower on the Rhine !

Do you think, O blue-eyed banditti,
Because you have scaled the wall,
Such an old moustache as I am
Is not a match for you all ?

I have you fast in my fortress,
And will not let you depart,
But put you down into the dungeons
In the round tower of my heart.

And there I will keep you forever,
Yes, forever and a day,
Till the walls shall crumble to ruin,
And moulder in dust away !

What shall be said as to the effect which a solitary life will produce upon a man's estimate of himself ? Shall it lead him to fancy himself a man of very great importance ? Or shall it tend to make him underrate himself, and allow inferior men of superior impudence to take the wall of him ? Possibly we have all seen each effect follow from a too lonely mode of life. Each may follow naturally enough.

Concerning Solitary Days. 79

Perhaps it is natural to imagine your mental stature to be higher than it is, when you have no one near with whom you may compare yourself. It no doubt tends to take down a human being from his self-conceit, to find himself no more than one of a large circle, no member of which is disposed to pay any special regard to his judgment, or in any way to yield him precedence. And the young man who has come in his solitary dwelling to think that he is no ordinary mortal, has that nonsense taken out of him when he goes back to spend some days in his father's house among a lot of brothers of nearly his own age, who are generally the very last of the race to believe in any man. But sometimes the opposite effect comes of the lonely life. You grow anxious, nervous, and timid ; you lose confidence in yourself, in the absence of any who may back up your failing sense of your own importance. You would like to shrink into a corner, and to slip quietly through life unnoticed. And all this without affectation, without the least latent feeling that perhaps you are not so very insignificant after all. Yet, even where men have come well to understand how infinitely little they are as regards the estimation of mankind, you will find them, if they live alone, cherishing some vain fancy that some few people, some distant friends, are sometimes thinking of them. You will find them arranging their papers, as though fancying that surely somebody would like some day to see them ; and

80 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

marshalling their sermons, as though in the vague notion that at some future time mortals would be found weak enough to read them. It is one of the things slowly learnt, by repeated lessons and lengthening experience, that nobody minds very much about you, my reader. You remember the sensitive test which Dr. Johnson suggested as to the depth of one mortal's feeling for another. How does it affect his appetite? Multitudes in London, he said, professed themselves extremely distressed at the hanging of Dr. Dodd; but how many on the morning he was hung took a materially worse breakfast than usual? Solitary dreamer, fancying that your distant friends feel deep interest in your goings-on, how many of them are there who would abridge their dinner if the black-edged note arrived by post which will some day chronicle the last fact in your worldly history?

You get, living alone, into little particular ways of your own. You know how, walking along a crowded street, you cannot keep a straight line: at every step you have to yield a little to right or left to avoid the passers-by. This is no great trouble: you do it almost unconsciously, and your journey is not appreciably lengthened. Even so, living in a family, walking along the path of life in the same track with many more, you find it needful scores of times each day to give up your own fancies and wishes and ways, in deference to those of others. You cannot

divide the day in that precise fashion which you would yourself like best. You must, in deciding what shall be the dinner-hour, regard what will suit others as well as you. You cannot sit always just in the corner or in the chair you would prefer. Sometimes you must tell your children a story when you are weary, or busy ; but you cannot find it in your heart to cast a shadow of disappointment on the eager little faces that come and ask you. You have to stop writing, many a time, in the middle of a sentence, to open your study door at the request of a little voice outside ; and to admit a little visitor who can give no more definite reason for her visit than that she has come to see you, and tell you she has been a good girl. And all this is well for you. It breaks in hour by hour upon your native selfishness. And it costs you not the slightest effort to give up your own wish to that of your child. Even if to middle age you retain the innocent taste for sweet-meats, would you not have infinitely greater pleasure in seeing your little boy or girl eating up the contents of your parcel, than in eating them yourself ? It is to me a thoroughly disgusting sight to see, as we sometimes do, the wife and children of a family kept in constant terror of the selfish bashaw at the head of the house, and ever on the watch to yield in every petty matter to his whims and fancies. Sometimes, where he is a hard-wrought and anxious man, whose hard work earns his children's bread, and

82 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

whose life is their sole stay, it is needful that he should be deferred to in many things, lest the overtaxed brain and overstrained nervous system should break down or grow unequal to their task. But I am not thinking of such cases. I mean cases in which the head of the family is a great fat, bullying, selfish scoundrel : who devours sullenly the choice dishes at dinner, and walks into all the fruit at dessert, while his wife looks on in silence, and the awe-stricken children dare not hint that they would like a little of what the brutal hound is devouring. I mean cases in which the contemptible dog is extremely well dressed, while his wife and children's attire is thin and bare ; in which he liberally tosses about his money in the billiard-room, and goes off in autumn for a tour on the Continent by himself, leaving them to the joyless routine of their unvaried life. It is sad to see the sudden hush that falls upon the little things when he enters the house ; how their sports are cut short, and they try to steal away from the room. Would that I were the Emperor of Russia, and such a man my subject ! Should not he taste the knout ? Should not I make him howl ? *That* would be his suitable punishment ; for *he* will never feel what worthier mortals would regard as the heavier penalty by far, the utter absence of confidence or real affection between him and his children when they grow up. He will not mind that there never was a day when the toddling creatures set up a shout

Concerning Solitary Days. 83

of delight at his entrance, and rushed at him and scaled him and searched in his pockets, and pulled him about ; nor that the day will never come when, growing into men and women, they will come to him for sympathy and guidance in their little trials and perplexities. Oh, woful to think that there are parents, held in general estimation too, to whom their children would no more think of going for kindly sympathy, than they would think of going to Nova Zembla for warmth !

But this is an *excursus* : I would that my hand were wielding a stout horsewhip rather than a pen ! Let me return to the point of deviation, and say that a human being, if he be true-hearted, by living in a family, insensibly and constantly is gently turned from his own stiff track ; and goes through life sinuously, so to speak. But the lonely man settles into his own little ways. He is like the man who walks through the desert without a soul to elbow him for miles. He fixes his own hours ; he sits in his own corner, in his peculiar chair ; he arranges the lamp where it best suits himself that it should stand ; he reads his newspaper when he pleases, for no one else wants to see it ; he orders from the club the books that suit his own taste. And all this quite fitly : like the Duke of Argyle's attacks upon Lord Derby, these things please himself, and do harm to nobody. It is not selfishness not to consult the

84 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

wishes of other people, if there be no other people whose wishes you can consult. And, though with great suffering to himself, I believe that many a kind-hearted, precise old bachelor, stiffened into his own ways through thirty solitary years, would yet make an effort to give them up, if he fancied that to yield a little from them was needful to the comfort of others. He would give up the corner by the fire in which he has sat through the life of a generation : he would resign to another the peg on which his hat has hung through that long time. Still, all this would cost a painful effort ; and one need hardly repeat the commonplace, that if people intend ever to get married, it is expedient that they should do so before they have settled too rigidly into their own ways.

It is a very touching thing, I think, to turn over the repositories of a lonely man after he is dead. You come upon so many indications of all his little ways and arrangements. In the case of men who have been the heads of large families, this work is done by those who have been most nearly connected with them, and who knew their ways before ; and such men, trained hourly to yield their own wishes in things small and great, have comparatively few of those little peculiar ways in which so much of their individuality seems to make its touching appeal to us after they are gone. But lonely men not merely have very many little arrangements of their own, but

Concerning Solitary Days. 85

have a particular reserve in exhibiting these : there is a strong sensitiveness about them : you know how they would have shrunk in life from allowing any one to turn over their papers, or even to look into the arrangements of their wardrobe and their linen-press. I remember once, after the sudden death of a reserved old gentleman, being one of two or three who went over all his repositories. The other people who did so with me were hard-headed lawyers, and did not seem to mind much ; but I remember that it appeared to me a most touching sight we saw. All the little ways into which he had grown in forty lonely years ; all those details about his property (a very large one), which in life he had kept entirely to himself—all these we saw. I remember, lying on the top of the documents contained in an iron chest, a little scrap of paper, the back of an ancient letter, on which was written a note of the amount of all his wealth. There you saw at once a secret which in life he would have confided to no one. I remember the precise arrangement of all the little piles of papers, so neatly tied up in separate parcels. I remember the pocket-handkerchiefs, of several different kinds, each set wrapped up by itself in a piece of paper. It was curious to think that he had counted and sorted those handkerchiefs ; and now he was so far away. What a contrast, the little cares of many little matters like that, and the solemn realities of the unseen world ! I would not on any


86 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

account have looked over these things alone. I should have had an awe-stricken expectation that I should be interrupted. I should have expected a sudden tap on the shoulder, and to be asked what I was doing there. And doubtless, in many such cases, when the repositories of the dead are first looked into by strangers, some one far away would be present, if such things could be.

Solitary men, of the class which I have in my mind, are generally very hard-wrought men, and are kept too busy to allow very much time for reverie. Still, there is some. There are evening hours after the task is done, when you sit by the fire, or walk up and down your study, and think that you are missing a great deal in this lonely life ; and that much more might be made of your stay in this world, whilst its best years are passing over. You think that there are many pleasant people in the world, people whom you would like to know, and who might like you if they knew you. But you and they have never met ; and if you go on in this solitary fashion, you and they never will meet. No doubt here is your comfortable room ; there is the blazing fire and the mellow lamp, and the warmly-curtained windows ; and pervading the silent chamber, there is the softened murmur of the not distant sea. The backs of your books look out at you like old friends ; and after you are married, you wont be

Concerning Solitary Days. 87

able to afford to buy so many. Still, you recall the cheerful society in which you have often spent such hours, and you think it might be well if you were not so completely cut off from it. You fancy you hear the hum of lively conversation, such as gently exhilarates the mind without tasking it; and again you think what a loss it is to live where you hardly ever hear music, whether good or bad. You think of the awkward shyness and embarrassment of manner which grow upon a man who is hardly ever called to join in general conversation. Yes, He knew our nature best who said that it is not good that man should be alone. We lean to our kind. There is indeed a solitariness which is the condition of an individual soul's being, which no association with others can do away; but there is no reason why we should add to that burden of personality which the Bishop of Oxford, in one of his most striking sermons, has shown to be truly 'an awful gift.' And say, youthful recluse (I don't mean *you*, middle-aged bachelor, I mean really young men of five or six and twenty), have you not sometimes, sitting by the fireside in the evening, looked at the opposite easy chair in the ruddy glow, and imagined that easy chair occupied by a gentle companion—one who would bring out into double strength all that is good in you—one who would sympathize with you and encourage you in all your work—one who would think you much wiser, cleverer, handsomer,



88 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

and better than any mortal has ever yet thought you—the *Angel in the House*, in short, to use the strong expression of Mr. Coventry Patmore? Probably you have imagined all that: possibly you have in some degree realized it all. If not, in all likelihood the fault lies chiefly with yourself.

It must be a dismal thing for a solitary man to be taken ill: I mean so seriously ill as to be confined to bed, yet not so dangerously ill as to make some relation or friend come at all sacrifices to be with you. The writer speaks merely from logical considerations: happily, he never experienced the case. But one can see that in that lonely life there can be none of those pleasant circumstances which make days in bed, when acute pain is over, or the dangerous turning-point of disease is happily past, as quietly enjoyable days as any man is ever likely to know. No one should ever be seriously ill (if he can help it) unless he be one of a considerable household. Even then, indeed, it will be advisable to be ill as seldom as may be. But to a person who when well is very hard-worked, and a good deal worried, what restful days those are of which we are thinking! You have such a feeling of peace and quietness. There you lie, in lazy luxury, when you are suffering merely the weakness of a serious illness, but the pain and danger are past. All your wants are so thoughtfully and kindly anticipated. It is a very

Concerning Solitary Days. 89

delightful sensation to lift your head from the pillow, and instantly to find yourself giddy and blind from loss of blood, and just drop your head down again. It is not a question, even for the most uneasily exacting conscience, whether you are to work or not: it is plain you cannot. There is no difficulty on *that* score. And then you are weakened to that degree that nothing worries you. Things going wrong or remaining neglected about the garden or the stable, which would have annoyed you when well, cannot touch you here. All you want is to lie still and rest. Everything is still. You faintly hear the door-bell ring; and though you live in a quiet country house where that phenomenon rarely occurs, you feel not the least curiosity to know who is there. You can look for a long time quite contentedly at the glow of the fire on the curtains and on the ceiling. You feel no anxiety about the coming in of the post; but when your letters and newspapers arrive, you luxuriously read them, a very little at a time, and you soon forget all you have read. You turn over and fall asleep for a while; then you read a little more. Your reviving appetite makes simple food a source of real enjoyment. The children come in, and tell you wonderful stories of all that has happened since you were ill. They are a little subdued at first, but soon grow noisy as usual; and their noise does not in the least disturb you. You hear it as though it were miles off. After days and

90 *Concerning Solitary Days.*

nights of great pain you understand the blessing of ease and rest : you are disposed to be pleased with everything, and everybody wants to please you. The day passes away, and the evening darkness comes before you are aware. Everything is strange, and everything is soothing and pleasant. The only disadvantage is, that you grow so fond of lying in bed, that you shrink extremely from the prospect of ever getting up again.

Having arrived at this point, at 10.45 on this Friday evening, I gathered up all the pages which have been written, and carried them to the fireside, and sitting there, I read them over ; and I confess, that on the whole, it struck me that the present essay was somewhat heavy. A severe critic might possibly say that it was stupid. I fancied it would have been rather good when it was sketched out ; but it has not come up to expectation. However, it is as good as I could make it ; and I trust the next essay may be better. It is a chance, you see, what the quality of any composition shall be. Give me a handle to turn, and I should undertake upon every day to turn it equally well. But in the working of the mental machine, the same pressure of steam, the same exertion of will, the same strain of what powers you have, will not always produce the same result. And if you, reader, feel some disappointment at looking at a new work by an old friend, and finding

Concerning Solitary Days. 91

it not up to the mark you expected, think how much greater his disappointment must have been as the texture rolled out from the loom, and he felt it was not what he had wished. Here, to-night, the room and the house are as still as in my remembrance of the Solitary Days which are gone. But they will not be still to-morrow morning ; and they are so now because sleep has hushed two little voices, and stayed the ceaseless movements of four little pattering feet. May those Solitary Days never return. They are well enough when the great look-out is onward ; but, oh ! how dreary such days must be to the old man whose main prospect is of the past ! I cannot imagine a lot more completely beyond all earthly consolation, than that of a man from whom wife and children have been taken away, and who lives now alone in the dwelling once gladdened by their presence, but now haunted by their memory. Let us humbly pray, my reader, that such a lot may never be yours or mine.

CHAPTER IV.

CONCERNING FUTURE YEARS.

DOES it ever come across you, my friend, with something of a start, that things cannot always go on in your lot as they are going now ? Does not a sudden thought sometimes flash upon you, a hasty, vivid glimpse of what you will be long hereafter, if you are spared in this world ? Our common way is too much to think that things will always go on as they are going. Not that we clearly think so : not that we ever put that opinion in a definite shape, and avow to ourselves that we hold it ; but we live very much under that vague, general impression. We can hardly help it. When a man of middle age inherits a pretty country seat, and makes up his mind that he cannot yet afford to give up his profession and go to live at it, but concludes that in six or eight years he will be able with justice to his children to do so, do you think he brings plainly before him the changes which must be wrought on himself and those around him by these years ? I do

not speak of the greatest change of all, which may come to any of us so very soon : I do not think of what may be done by unlooked-for accident : I think merely of what must be done by the passing on of time. I think of possible changes in taste and feeling, of possible loss of liking for that mode of life. I think of lungs that will play less freely, and of limbs that will suggest shortened walks, and dissuade from climbing hills. I think how the children will have outgrown daisy-chains, or even got beyond the season of climbing trees. The middle-aged man enjoys the prospect of the time when he shall go to his country house ; and the vague, undefined belief surrounds him, like an atmosphere, that he and his children, his views and likings, will be then just as they are now. He cannot bring it home to him at how many points change will be cutting into him, and hedging him in, and paring him down. And we all live very much under that vague impression. Yet it is in many ways good for us to feel that we are going on—passing from the things which surround us—advancing into the undefined future, into the unknown land. And I think that sometimes we all have vivid flashes of such a conviction. I dare say, my friend, you have seen an old man, frail, soured, and shabby, and you have thought, with a start, Perhaps *there* is Myself of Future Years.

We human beings can stand a great deal. There

94 *Concerning Future Years.*

is great margin allowed by our constitution, physical and moral. I suppose there is no doubt that a man may daily for years eat what is unwholesome, breathe air which is bad, or go through a round of life which is not the best or the right one for either body or mind, and yet be little the worse. And so men pass through great trials and through long years, and yet are not altered so very much. The other day, walking along the street, I saw a man whom I had not seen for ten years. I knew that since I saw him last he had gone through very heavy troubles, and that these had sat very heavily upon him. I remembered how he had lost that friend who was the dearest to him of all human beings, and I knew how broken down he had been for many months after that great sorrow came. Yet there he was, walking along, an unnoticed unit, just like any one else; and he was looking wonderfully well. No doubt he seemed pale, worn, and anxious: but he was very well and carefully dressed; he was walking with a brisk, active step; and I dare say in feeling pretty well reconciled to being what he is, and to the circumstances amid which he is living. Still, one felt that somehow a tremendous change had passed over him. I felt sorry for him, and all the more that he did not seem to feel sorry for himself. It made me sad to think that some day I should be like him; that perhaps in the eyes of my juniors I look like him already, careworn and ageing. I dare say

in his feeling there was no such sense of falling off. Perhaps he was tolerably content. He was walking so fast, and looking so sharp, that I am sure he had no desponding feeling at the time. Despondency goes with slow movements and with vague looks. The sense of having materially fallen off is destructive to the eagle-eye. Yes, he was tolerably content. We can go down-hill cheerfully, save at the points where it is sharply brought home to us that we are going down-hill. Lately I sat at dinner opposite an old lady who had the remains of striking beauty. I remember how much she interested me. Her hair was false, her teeth were false, her complexion was shrivelled, her form had lost the round symmetry of earlier years, and was angular and stiff; yet how cheerful and lively she was! She had gone far down-hill physically; but either she did not feel her decadence, or she had grown quite reconciled to it. Her daughter, a blooming matron, was there, happy, wealthy, good; yet not apparently a whit more reconciled to life than the aged grandame. It was pleasing, and yet it was sad, to see how well we can make up our mind to what is inevitable. And such a sight brings up to one a glimpse of Future Years. The cloud seems to part before one, and through the rift you discern your earthly track far away, and a jaded pilgrim plodding along it with weary step; and though the pilgrim does not look like you, yet you know the pilgrim is yourself.

96 *Concerning Future Years.*

This cannot always go on. To what is it all tending? I am not thinking now of an out-look so grave that this is not the place to discuss it. But I am thinking how everything is going on. In this world there is no standing still. And everything that belongs entirely to this world, its interests and occupations, is going on towards a conclusion. It will all come to an end. It cannot go on for ever. I cannot always be writing sermons as I do now, and going on in this regular course of life. I cannot always be writing essays. The day will come when I shall have no more to say, or when the readers of the Magazine will no longer have patience to listen to me in that kind fashion in which they have listened so long. I foresee it plainly, this evening,—the time when the reader shall open the familiar cover, and glance at the table of contents, and exclaim indignantly, ‘Here is that tiresome person again with the four initials: why will he not cease to weary us?’ I write in sober sadness, my friend: I do not intend any jest. If you do not know that what I have written is certainly true, you have not lived very long. You have not learned the sorrowful lesson, that all worldly occupations and interests are wearing to their close. You cannot keep up the old thing, however much you may wish to do so. You know how vain anniversaries for the most part are. You meet with certain old friends, to try to revive the old days; but the spirit of the old time

will not come over you. It is not a spirit that can be raised at will. It cannot go on for ever, that walking down to church on Sundays, and ascending those pulpit steps ; it will change to feeling, though I humbly trust it may be long before it shall change in fact. Don't you all sometimes feel something like that ? Don't you sometimes look about you and say to yourself, That furniture will wear out : those window-curtains are getting sadly faded ; they will not last a lifetime ? Those carpets must be replaced some day ; and the old patterns which looked at you with a kindly, familiar expression, through these long years, must be among the old familiar faces that are gone. These are little things, indeed, but they are among the vague recollections that bewilder our memory ; they are among the things which come up in the strange, confused remembrance of the dying man in the last days of life. There is an old fir-tree, a twisted, strange-looking fir-tree, which will be among my last recollections, I know, as it was among my first. It was always before my eyes when I was three, four, five years old : I see the pyramidal top, rising over a mass of shrubbery ; I see it always against a sunset sky ; always in the subdued twilight in which we seem to see things in distant years. These old friends will die, you think ; who will take their place ? You will be an old gentleman, a frail old gentleman, wondered at by younger men, and telling them long

98 *Concerning Future Years.*

stories about the days when Queen Victoria was a young woman, like those which weary you now about George the Third. It will not be the same world then. Your children will not always be children. Enjoy their fresh youth while it lasts, for it will not last long. Do not skim over the present too fast, through a constant habit of onward-looking. Many men of an anxious turn are so eagerly concerned in providing for the future, that they hardly remark the blessings of the present. Yet it is only because the future will some day be present, that it deserves any thought at all. And many men, instead of heartily enjoying present blessings while they are present, train themselves to a habit of regarding these things as merely the foundation on which they are to build some vague fabric of they know not what. I have known a clergyman, who was very fond of music, and in whose church the music was very fine, who seemed incapable of enjoying its solemn beauty as a thing to be enjoyed while passing, but who persisted in regarding each beautiful strain merely as a promising indication of what his choir would come at some future time to be. It is a very bad habit, and one which grows unless repressed. You, my reader, when you see your children racing on the green, train yourself to regard all that as a happy end in itself. Do not grow to think merely that those sturdy young limbs promise to be stout and service-

able when they are those of a grown-up man ; and rejoice in the smooth little forehead with its curly hair, without any forethought of how it is to look some day when overshadowed (as it is sure to be) by the great wig of the Lord Chancellor. Good advice : let us all try to take it. Let all happy things be enjoyed as ends, as well as regarded as means. Yet it is in the make of our nature to be ever onward-looking ; and we cannot help it. When you get the first number for the year of the Magazine which you take in, you instinctively think of it as the first portion of a new volume ; and you are conscious of a certain though slight restlessness in the thought of a thing incomplete, and of a wish that you had the volume completed. And sometimes, thus looking onward into the future, you worry yourself with little thoughts and cares. There is that old dog : you have had him for many years ; he is growing stiff and frail ; what are you to do when he dies ? When he is gone, the new dog you get will never be like him ; he may be, indeed, a far handsomer and more amiable animal, but he will not be your old companion ; he will not be surrounded with all those old associations, not merely with your own by-past life, but with the lives, the faces, and the voices of those who have left you, which invest with a certain sacredness even that humble but faithful friend. He will not have been the companion of your youthful walks, when you went at a

pace which now you cannot attain. He will just be a common dog ; and who that has reached your years cares for *that* ? The other indeed was a dog too, but that was merely the substratum on which was accumulated a host of recollections : it is *Auld Lang Syne* that walks into your study when your shaggy friend of ten summers comes stiffly in, and after many querulous turnings lays himself down on the rug before the fire. Do you not feel the like when you look at many little matters, and then look into the Future Years ? That harness—how will you replace it ? It will be a pang to throw it by, and it will be a considerable expense too to get a new suit. Then you think how long harness may continue to be serviceable. I once saw, on a pair of horses drawing a stage-coach among the hills, a set of harness which was thirty-five years old. It had been very costly and grand when new ; it had belonged for some of its earliest years to a certain wealthy nobleman. The nobleman had been for many years in his grave, but there was his harness still. It was tremendously patched, and the blinkers were of extraordinary aspect ; but it was quite serviceable. There is comfort for you, poor country parsons ! How thoroughly I understand your feeling about such little things. I know how you sometimes look at your phaeton or your dog-cart : and even while the morocco is fresh, and the wheels still are running with their first tires,

how you think you see it after it is grown shabby and old-fashioned. Yes, you remember, not without a dull kind of pang, that it is wearing out. You have a neighbour, perhaps, a few miles off, whose conveyance, through the wear of many years, has become remarkably seedy ; and every time you meet it you think that there you see your own, as it will some day be. Every dog has his day : but the day of the rational dog is overclouded in a fashion unknown to his inferior fellow-creature ; it is overclouded by the anticipation of the coming day which will not be his. You remember how that great though morbid man, John Foster, could not heartily enjoy the summer weather, for thinking how every sunny day that shone upon him was a downward step towards the winter gloom. Each indication that the season was progressing, even though progressing as yet only to greater beauty, filled him with great grief. ‘I have seen a fearful sight to-day,’ he would say, ‘I have seen a buttercup.’ And we know, of course, that in his case there was nothing like affectation ; it was only that, unhappily for himself, the bent of his mind was so onward-looking, that he saw only a premonition of the snows of December in the roses of June. It would be a blessing if we could quite discard the tendency. And while your trap runs smoothly and noiselessly, while the leather is fresh and the paint unscratched, do not worry yourself with visions of the day when

it will rattle and creak, and when you will make it wait for you at the corner of back-streets when you drive into town. Do not vex yourself by fancying that you will never have heart to send off the old carriage, nor by wondering where you will find the money to buy a new one.

Have you ever read the *Life of Mansie Wauch, Tailor in Dalkeith*, by that pleasing poet and most amiable man, the late David Macbeth Moir ? I have been looking into it lately : and I have regretted much that the Lowland Scotch dialect is so imperfectly understood in England, and that even where so far understood its raciness is so little felt ; for great as is the popularity of that work, it is much less known than it deserves to be. Only a Scotchman can thoroughly appreciate it. It is curious, and yet it is not curious, to find the pathos and the polish of one of the most touching and elegant of poets in the man who has with such irresistible humour, sometimes approaching to the farcical, delineated humble Scotch life. One passage in the book always struck me very much. We have in it the poet as well as the humourist ; and it is a perfect example of what I have been trying to describe in the pages which you have read. I mean the passage in which Mansie tells us of a sudden glimpse which, in circumstances of mortal terror, he once had of the future. On a certain 'awful night' the tailor was awakened by cries of alarm, and, looking out, he saw the next house

Concerning Future Years. 103

to his own was on fire from cellar to garret. The earnings of poor Mansie's whole life were laid out on his stock in trade and his furniture, and it appeared likely that these would be at once destroyed.

Then (says he) the darkness of the latter days came over my spirit like a vision before the prophet Isaiah; and I could see nothing in the years to come but beggary and starvation—myself a fallen-back old man, with an out-at-the-elbows coat, a greasy hat, and a bald brow, hirpling over a staff, requeeshing an awmous: Nanse a broken-hearted beggar-wife, torn down to tatters, and weeping like Rachel when she thought on better days; and poor wee Benjie going from door to door with a meal-pock on his back.

Ah, there is exquisite pathos *there* as well as humour: but the thing for which I have quoted that sentence is its startling truthfulness. You have all done what Mansie Wauch did, I know. Every one has his own way of doing it, and it is his own special picture which each sees; but there has appeared to us, as to Mansie (I must recur to my old figure), as it were a sudden rift in the clouds that conceal the future, and we have seen the way, far ahead—the dusty way—and an aged pilgrim pacing slowly along it; and in that aged figure we have each recognised our own young self. How often have I sat down on the mossy wall that surrounded my churchyard, when I had more time for reverie than I have now—sat upon the mossy wall, under a great oak, whose branches came low down and projected far out—and looked at the rough gnarled bark, and at the passing river, and at the belfry of the little church, and there

104 *Concerning Future Years.*

and then thought of Mansie Wauch and of his vision of Future Years ! How often in these hours, or in long solitary walks and rides among the hills, have I had visions clear as that of Mansie Wauch, of how I should grow old in my country parish ! Do not think that I wish or intend to be egotistical, my friendly reader. I describe these feelings and fancies because I think this is the likeliest way in which to reach and describe your own. There was a rapid little stream that flowed, in a very lonely place, between the highway and a cottage to which I often went to see a poor old woman ; and when I came out of the cottage, having made sure that no one saw me, I always took a great leap over the little stream, which saved going round a little way. And never once, for several years, did I thus cross it without seeing a picture as clear to the mind's eye as Mansie Wauch's—a picture which made me walk very thoughtfully along for the next mile or two. It was curious to think how one was to get through the accustomed duty after having grown old and frail. The day would come when the brook could be crossed in that brisk fashion no more. It must be an odd thing for the parson to walk as an old man into the pulpit, still his own, which was his own when he was a young man of six-and-twenty. What a crowd of old remembrances must be present each Sunday to the clergyman's mind, who has served the same parish and preached in the same church for

fifty years ! Personal identity, continued through the successive stages of life, is a commonplace thing to think of ; but when it is brought home to your own case and feeling, it is a very touching and a very bewildering thing. There are the same trees and hills as when you were a boy ; and when each of us comes to his last days in this world, how short a space it will seem since we were little children ! Let us humbly hope that in that brief space parting the cradle from the grave, we may (by help from above) have accomplished a certain work which will cast its blessed influence over all the years and all the ages before us. Yet it remains a strange thing to look forward and to see yourself with grey hair, and not much even of that ; to see your wife an old woman, and your little boy or girl grown up into manhood or womanhood. It is more strange still to fancy you see them all going on as usual in the round of life, and you no longer among them. You see your empty chair. There is your writing-table and your inkstand ; there are your books, not so carefully arranged as they used to be ; perhaps on the whole less indication than you might have hoped that they miss you. All this is strange when you bring it home to your own case ; and that hundreds of millions have felt the like makes it none the less strange to you. The commonplaces of life and death are not commonplace when they befall ourselves. It was in desperate hurry and agitation that Mansie

106 *Concerning Future Years.*

Wauch saw his vision ; and in like circumstances you may have yours too. But for the most part such moods come in leisure—in saunterings through the autumn woods—in reveries by the winter fire.

I do not think, thus musing upon our occasional glimpses of the future, of such fancies as those of early youth—fancies and anticipations of greatness, of felicity, of fame ; I think of the onward views of men approaching middle age, who have found their place and their work in life, and who may reasonably believe that, save for great unexpected accidents, there will be no very material change in their lot till that ‘change come’ to which Job looked forward four thousand years since. There are great numbers of educated folk who are likely always to live in the same kind of house, to have the same establishment, to associate with the same class of people, to walk along the same streets, to look upon the same hills, as long as they live. The only change will be the gradual one which will be wrought by advancing years.

And the onward view of such people in such circumstances is generally a very vague one. It is only now and then that there comes the startling clearness of prospect so well set forth by Mansie Wauch. Yet sometimes when such a vivid view comes it remains for days, and is a painful companion of your solitude. Don’t you remember, clerical reader of thirty-two, having seen a good deal of an old parson,

rather sour in aspect, rather shabby-looking, sadly pinched for means, and with powers dwarfed by the sore struggle with the world to maintain his family and to keep up a respectable appearance upon his limited resources; perhaps with his mind made petty and his temper spoiled by the little worries, the petty malignant tattle and gossip and occasional insolence of a little backbiting village; and don't you remember how for days you felt haunted by a sort of nightmare that there was what you would be, if you lived so long? Yes; you know how there have been times when for ten days together that jarring thought would intrude, whenever your mind was disengaged from work; and sometimes when you went to bed, that thought kept you awake for hours. You knew the impression was morbid, and you were angry with yourself for your silliness; but you could not drive it away.

It makes a great difference in the prospect of Future Years if you are one of those people who, even after middle age, may still make a great rise in life. This will prolong the restlessness which in others is sobered down at forty: it will extend the period during which you will every now and then have brief seasons of feverish anxiety, hope, and fear, followed by longer stretches of blank disappointment. And it will afford the opportunity of experiencing a vividly new sensation, and of turning over a quite new leaf, after most people have settled to the jog-

108 *Concerning Future Years.*

trot at which the remainder of the pilgrimage is to be covered. A clergyman of the Church of England may be made a bishop, and exchange a quiet rectory for a palace. No doubt the increase of responsibility is to a conscientious man almost appalling ; but surely the rise in life is great. There you are, one of four-and-twenty, selected out of near twenty thousand. It is possible, indeed, that you may feel more reason for shame than for elation at the thought. A barrister unknown to fame, but of respectable standing, may be made a judge. Such a man may even, if he gets into the groove, be gradually pushed on till he reaches an eminence which probably surprises himself as much as any one else. A good speaker in Parliament may at sixty or seventy be made a Cabinet Minister. And we can all imagine what indescribable pride and elation must in such cases possess the wife and daughters of the man who has attained this decided step in advance. I can say sincerely that I never saw human beings walk with so airy tread, and evince so fussily their sense of a greatness more than mortal, as the wife and the daughter of an amiable but not able bishop I knew in my youth, when they came to church on the Sunday morning on which the good man preached for the first time in his lawn sleeves. Their heads were turned for the time ; but they gradually came right again, as the ladies became accustomed to the summits of human affairs. Let it be said for the

bishop himself, that there was not a vestige of that sense of elevation about *him*. He looked perfectly modest and unaffected. His dress was remarkably ill put on, and his sleeves stuck out in the most awkward fashion ever assumed by drapery. I suppose that sometimes these rises in life come very unexpectedly. I have heard of a man who, when he received a letter from the Prime Minister of the day offering him a place of great dignity, thought the letter was a hoax, and did not notice it for several days. You could not certainly infer from his modesty what has proved to be the fact, that he has filled his place admirably well. The possibility of such material changes must no doubt tend to prolong the interest in life, which is ready to flag as years go on. But perhaps with the majority of men, the level is found before middle age, and no very great worldly change awaits them. The path stretches on, with its ups and downs; and they only hope for strength for the day. But in such men's lot of humble duty and quiet content there remains room for many fears. All human beings, who are as well off as they can ever be, and so who have little room for hope, seem to be liable to the invasion of great fear as they look into the future. It seems to be so with Kings, and with great nobles. Many such have lived in a nervous dread of change, and have ever been watching the signs of the times with apprehensive eyes. Nothing that can happen can

110 *Concerning Future Years.*

well make such better ; and so they suffer from the vague foreboding of something which will make them worse. And the same law reaches to those in whom hope is narrowed down, not by the limit of grand possibility, but of little ; not by the fact that they have got all that mortal can get, but by the fact that they have got the little which is all that Providence seems to intend to give to *them*. And indeed there is something that is almost awful, when your affairs are all going happily, when your mind is clear and equal to its work, when your bodily health is unbroken, when your home is pleasant, when your income is ample, when your children are healthy and merry and hopeful—in looking on to Future Years. The more happy you are, the more there is of awe in the thought how frail are the foundations of your earthly happiness : what havoc may be made of them by the chances of even a single day. It is no wonder that the solemnity and awfulness of the Future have been felt so much that the languages of Northern Europe have, as I dare say you know, no word which expresses the essential notion of Futurity. You think, perhaps, of *shall* and *will*. Well, these words have come now to convey the notion of Futurity ; but they do so only in a secondary fashion. Look to their etymology, and you will see that they *imply* Futurity, but do not *express* it. *I shall* do such a thing, means *I am bound to do it, I am under an obligation to do it*. *I will* do such a thing, means

Concerning Future Years. 111

I intend to do it, It is my present purpose to do it. Of course, if you are under an obligation to do anything, or if it be your intention to do anything, the probability is that the thing will be done: but the Northern family of languages ventures no nearer than *that* towards the expression of the bare, awful idea of Future Time. It was no wonder that Mr. Croaker was able to cast a gloom upon the gayest circle, and the happiest conjuncture of circumstances, by wishing that all might be as well that day six months. Six months? What might that time not do? Perhaps you have not read a little poem of Barry Cornwall's, the idea of which must come home to the heart of most of us:—

Touch us gently, Time!
Let us glide adown thy stream,
Gently,—as we sometimes glide
Through a quiet dream.
Humble voyagers are we,
Husband, wife, and children three—
One is lost,—an angel, fled
To the azure overhead.

Touch us gently, Time!
We've not proud nor soaring wings:
Our ambition, our content,
Lies in simple things.
Humble voyagers are we
O'er life's dim unsounded sea,
Seeking only some calm clime:—
Touch us gently, gentle Time!

I know that sometimes, my friend, you will not

112 *Concerning Future Years.*

have much sleep if, when you lay your head on your pillow, you begin to think how much depends upon your health and life. You have reached now that time at which you value life and health not so much for their service to yourself, as for their needfulness to others. There is a petition familiar to me in this Scotch country where people make their prayers for themselves, which seems to me to possess great solemnity and force when we think of all that is implied in it. It is, *Spare useful lives!* One life, the slender line of blood passing into and passing out of one human heart, may decide the question whether wife and children shall grow up affluent, refined, happy, yes, and *good*; or be reduced to hard straits, with all the manifold evils which grow out of poverty in the case of those who have been reduced to it after knowing other things. You often think, I doubt not, in quiet hours, what would become of your children if you were gone. You have done, I trust, what you can to care for them, even from your grave: you think sometimes of a poetical figure of speech amid the dry technical phrases of English law: you know what is meant by the law of *Mortmain*; and you like to think that even your *dead hand* may be felt to be kindly intermeddling yet in the affairs of those who were your dearest: that some little sum, slender perhaps, but as liberal as you could make it, may come in periodically when it is wanted, and seem like the gift of a thoughtful

heart and a kindly hand which are far away. Yes, cut down your present income to any extent, that you may make some provision for your children after you are dead. You do not wish that they should have the saddest of all reasons for taking care of you, and trying to lengthen out your life. But even after you have done everything which your small means permit, you will still think, with an anxious heart, of the possibilities of Future Years. A man or woman who has children has very strong reason for wishing to live as long as may be, and has no right to trifle with health or life. And sometimes, looking out into days to come, you think of the little things, hitherto so free from man's heritage of care, as they may some day be. You see them shabby, and early anxious: can *that* be the little boy's rosy face, now so pale and thin? You see them in a poor room, in which you recognise your study chairs, with the hair coming out of the cushions; and a carpet which you remember, now threadbare and in holes.

It is no wonder at all that people are so anxious about money. Money means every desirable material thing on earth; and the manifold immaterial things which come of material possessions. Poverty is the most comprehensive earthly evil; all conceivable evils, temporal, spiritual, and eternal, may come of *that*. Of course, great temptations attend its opposite; and the wise man's prayer will be what it was

114 *Concerning Future Years.*

long ago—‘Give me neither poverty nor riches.’ But let us have no nonsense talked about money being of no consequence. The want of it has made many a father and mother tremble at the prospect of being taken from their children ; the want of it has embittered many a parent’s dying hours. You hear selfish persons talking vaguely about faith. You find such heartless persons jauntily spending all they get on themselves, and then leaving their poor children to beggary, with the miserable pretext that they are doing all this through their abundant trust in God. Now this is not faith, it is insolent presumption. It is exactly as if a man should jump from the top of St. Paul’s, and say that he had faith that the Almighty would keep him from being dashed to pieces on the pavement. There is a high authority as to such cases—‘Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.’ If God had promised that people should never fall into the miseries of penury under any circumstances, it would be faith to trust that promise, however unlikely of fulfilment it might seem in any particular case. But God has made no such promise ; and if you leave your children without provision, you have no right to expect that they shall not suffer the natural consequences of your heartlessness and thoughtlessness. True faith lies in your doing everything you possibly can, and *then* humbly trusting in God. And if, after you have done your very best, you must still go, with

Concerning Future Years. 115

but a blank outlook for those you leave, why, *then* you may trust them to the Husband of the widow and Father of the fatherless. Faith, as regards such matters, means firm belief that God will do all he has promised to do, however difficult or unlikely. But some people seem to think that faith means firm belief that God will do whatever they think would suit them, however unreasonable, and however flatly in the face of all the established laws of His government.

We all have it in our power to make ourselves miserable, if we look far into future years and calculate their probabilities of evil, and steadily anticipate the worst. It is not expedient to calculate too far a-head. Of course, the right way in this, as in other things, is the middle way ; we are not to run either into the extreme of over-carefulness and anxiety on the one hand, or of recklessness and imprudence on the other. But as mention has been made of faith, it may safely be said that we are forgetful of that rational trust in God which is at once our duty and our inestimable privilege, if we are always looking out into the future, and vexing ourselves with endless fears as to how things are to go then. There is no divine promise that if a reckless blockhead leaves his children to starve, they shall not starve. And a certain inspired volume speaks with extreme severity of the man who fails to provide for

116 *Concerning Future Years.*

them of his own house. But there *is* a divine promise which says to the humble Christian—‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ If your affairs are going on fairly now, be thankful, and try to do your duty, and to do your best, as a Christian man and a prudent man, and then leave the rest to God. Your children are about you; no doubt they may die, and it is fit enough that you should not forget the fragility of your most prized possessions; it is fit enough that you should sometimes sit by the fire and look at the merry faces and listen to the little voices, and think what it would be to lose them. But it is not needful, or rational, or Christian-like, to be always brooding on that thought. And when they grow up it may be hard to provide for them. The little thing that is sitting on your knee may before many years be alone in life, thousands of miles from you and from his early home, an insignificant item in the bitter price which Britain pays for her Indian Empire. It is even possible, though you hardly for a moment admit *that* thought, that the child may turn out a heartless and wicked man, and prove your shame and heart-break; all wicked and heartless men have been the children of somebody; and many of them doubtless the children of those who surmised the future as little as Eve did when she smiled upon the infant Cain. And the fireside by which you sit, now merry and noisy enough, may grow lonely—lonely with the second

loneliness, not the hopeful solitude of youth looking forward, but the desponding loneliness of age looking back. And it is so with everything else. Your health may break down. Some fearful accident may befall you. The readers of the magazine may cease to care for your articles. People may get tired of your sermons. People may stop buying your books, your wine, your groceries, your milk and cream. Younger men may take away your legal business. Yet how often these fears prove utterly groundless ! It was good and wise advice given by one who had managed, with a cheerful and hopeful spirit, to pass through many trying and anxious years, to ‘take short views :’—not to vex and worry yourself by planning too far a-head. And a wiser than the wise and cheerful Sydney Smith had anticipated his philosophy. You remember Who said ‘Take no thought’—that is, no over-anxious and over-careful thought—‘for the morrow ; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself.’ Did you ever sail over a blue summer sea towards a mountainous coast, frowning, sullen, gloomy ; and have you not seen the gloom retire before you as you advanced ; the hills, grim in the distance, stretch into sunny slopes when you neared them ; and the waters smile in cheerful light that looked so black when they were far away ? And who is there that has not seen the parallel in actual life ? We have all known the anticipated ills of

118 *Concerning Future Years.*

life—the danger that looked so big, the duty that looked so arduous, the entanglement that we could not see our way through—prove to have been nothing more than spectres on the far horizon; and when at length we reached them, all their difficulty had vanished into air, leaving us to think what fools we had been for having so needlessly conjured up phantoms to disturb our quiet. Yes, there is no doubt of it, a very great part of all we suffer in this world is from the apprehension of things that never come. I remember well how a dear friend whom I (and many more) lately lost, told me many times of his fears as to what he would do in a certain contingency which both he and I thought was quite sure to come sooner or later. I know that the anticipation of it caused him some of the most anxious hours of a very anxious though useful and honoured life. How vain his fears proved! He was taken from this world before what he dreaded had cast its most distant shadow. Well, let me try to discard the notion which has been sometimes worrying me of late, that perhaps I have written nearly as many essays as any one will care to read. Don't let any of us give way to fears which may prove to have been entirely groundless.

And then, if we are really spared to see those trials we sometimes think of, and which it is right that we should sometimes think of, the strength for them will come at the time. They will not look

Concerning Future Years. 119

nearly so black, and we shall be enabled to bear them bravely. There is in human nature a marvellous power of accommodation to circumstances. We can gradually make up our mind to almost anything. If this were a sermon instead of an essay, I should explain my theory of how this comes to be. I see in all this something beyond the mere natural instinct of acquiescence in what is inevitable; something beyond the benevolent law in the human mind, that it shall adapt itself to whatever circumstances it may be placed in; something beyond the doing of the gentle comforter Time. Yes, it is wonderful what people can go through, wonderful what people can get reconciled to. I dare say my friend Smith, when his hair began to fall off, made frantic efforts to keep it on. I have no doubt he anxiously' tried all the vile concoctions which quackery advertises in the newspapers, for the advantage of those who wish for luxuriant locks. I dare say for a while it really weighed upon his mind and disturbed his quiet, that he was getting bald. But now he has quite reconciled himself to his lot; and with a head smooth and sheeny as the egg of the ostrich, Smith goes on through life, and feels no pang at the remembrance of the ambrosial curls of his youth. Most young people, I dare say, think it will be a dreadful thing to grow old: a girl of eighteen thinks it must be an awful sensation to be thirty. Believe me, not at all. You are brought to

120 *Concerning Future Years.*

it bit by bit; and when you reach the spot you rather like the view. And it is so with graver things. We grow able to do and to bear that which it is needful that we should do and bear. As is the day, so the strength proves to be. And you have heard people tell you truly, that they have been enabled to bear what they never thought they could have come through with their reason or their life. I have no fear for the Christian man, so he keeps to the path of duty. Straining up the steep hill, his heart will grow stout in just proportion to its steepness. Yes, and if the call to martyrdom came, I should not despair of finding men who would show themselves equal to it, even in this commonplace age, and among people who wear Highland cloaks and knickerbockers. The martyr's strength would come with the martyr's day. It is because there is no call for it now, that people look so little like it.

It is very difficult, in this world, to strongly enforce a truth, without seeming to push it into an extreme. You are very apt, in avoiding one error, to run into the opposite error; forgetting that truth and right lie generally between two extremes. And in agreeing with Sydney Smith, as to the wisdom and the duty of 'taking short views,' let us take care of appearing to approve the doings of those foolish and unprincipled people who will keep no out-look into the future time at all. A bee, you know, cannot see more than a single inch before it; and

there are many men, and perhaps more women, who appear, as regards their domestic concerns, to be very much of bees. Not bees in the respect of being busy ; but bees in the respect of being blind. You see this in all ranks of life. You see it in the artisan, earning good wages, yet with every prospect of being weeks out of work next summer or winter ; who yet will not be persuaded to lay by a little in preparation for a rainy day. You see it in the country gentleman, who, having five thousand a year, spends ten thousand a year ; resolutely shutting his eyes to the certain and not very remote consequences. You see it in the man who walks into a shop and buys a lot of things which he has not the money to pay for, in the vague hope that something will turn up. It is a comparatively thoughtful and anxious class of men who systematically overcloud the present by anticipations of the future. The more usual thing is to sacrifice the future to the present ; to grasp at what in the way of present gratification or gain can be got, with very little thought of the consequences. You see silly women, the wives of men whose families are mainly dependent on their lives, constantly urging on their husbands to extravagances which eat up the little provision which might have been made for themselves and their children when he is gone who earned their bread. There is no sadder sight, I think, than that which is not a very uncommon sight, the careworn, anxious husband, labouring

beyond his strength, often sorrowfully calculating how he may make the ends to meet, denying himself in every way ; and the extravagant idiot of a wife, bedizened with jewellery and arrayed in velvet and lace, who tosses away his hard earnings in reckless extravagance : in entertainments which he cannot afford, given to people who do not care a rush for him ; in preposterous dress ; in absurd furniture ; in needless men-servants ; in green-grocers above measure ; in resolute aping of the way of living of people with twice or three times the means. It is sad to see all the forethought, prudence, and moderation of the wedded pair confined to one of them. You would say that it will not be any solid consolation to the widow, when the husband is fairly worried into his grave at last—when his daughters have to go out as governesses, and she has to let lodgings—to reflect that while he lived they never failed to have champagne at his dinner parties ; and that they had three men to wait at table on such occasions, while Mr. Smith next door had never more than one and a maidservant. If such idiotic women would but look forward, and consider how all this must end ! If the professional man spends all he earns, what remains when the supply is cut off, when the toiling head and hand can toil no more ? Ah, a little of the economy and management which must perforce be practised after *that*, might have tended powerfully to put off the evil day. Sometimes the husband is

merely the careworn drudge who provides what the wife squanders. Have you not known such a thing as that a man should be labouring under an Indian sun, and cutting down every personal expense to the last shilling, that he might send a liberal allowance to his wife in England ; while she meanwhile was recklessly spending twice what was thus sent her ; running up overwhelming accounts, dashing about to public balls, paying for a bouquet what cost the poor fellow far away much thought to save, giving costly entertainments at home, filling her house with idle and empty-headed scapegraces, carrying on scandalous flirtations ; till it becomes a happy thing if the certain ruin she is bringing on her husband's head is cut short by the needful interference of Sir Cresswell Cresswell ? There are cases in which tarring and feathering would sopthe the moral sense of the right-minded onlooker. And even where things are not so bad as in the case of which we have been thinking, it remains the social curse of this age, that people with a few hundreds a year determinedly act in various respects as if they had as many thousands. The dinner given by a man with eight hundred a year, in certain regions of the earth which I could easily point out, is, as regards food, wine, and attendance, precisely the same as the dinner given by another man who has five thousand a year. When will this end ? When will people see its silliness ? In truth, you do not really, as

124 *Concerning Future Years.*

things are in this country, make many people better off by adding a little or a good deal to their yearly income. For in all probability they were living up to the very extremity of their means before they got the addition: and in all probability the first thing they do on getting the addition, is so far to increase their establishment and their expense that it is just as hard a struggle as ever to make the ends meet. It would not be a pleasant arrangement that a man who was to be carried across the straits from England to France, should be fixed on a board so weighted that his mouth and nostrils should be at the level of the water, and thus that he should be struggling for life, and barely escaping drowning, all the way. Yet hosts of people, whom no one proposes to put under restraint, do as regards their income and expenditure a precisely analogous thing. They deliberately weight themselves to that degree that their heads are barely above water, and that any unforeseen emergency dips their heads under. They rent a house a good deal dearer than they can justly afford; and they have servants more and more expensive than they ought; and by many such things they make sure that their progress through life shall be a drowning struggle. While if they would rationally resolve and manfully confess that they cannot afford to have things as richer folk have them, and arrange their way of living in accordance with what they can afford, they would enjoy the feeling of ease and

comfort ; they would not be ever on the wretched stretch on which they are now, nor keeping up the hollow appearance of what is not the fact. But there are folk who make it a point of honour never to admit that in doing, or not doing anything, they are actuated for an instant by so despicable a consideration as the question whether or not they can afford it. And who shall reckon up the brains which this social calamity has driven into disease, or the early paralytic shocks which it has brought on ?

When you were very young, and looked forward to future years, did you ever feel a painful fear that you might outgrow your early home affections, and your associations with your native scenes ? Did you ever think to yourself, Will the day come when I shall have been years away from that river's side, and yet not care ? I think we have all known the feeling. O plain church to which I used to go when I was a child, and where I used to think the singing so very splendid : O little room where I used to sleep ; and you, tall tree, on whose topmost branch I cut the initials which perhaps the reader knows ; did I not even then wonder to myself if the time would ever come when I should be far away from you—far away as now, for many years, and not likely to go back—and yet feel entirely indifferent to the matter ; and did not I even then feel a strange pain in the fear that very likely it might ? These

126 *Concerning Future Years.*

things come across the mind of a little boy with a curious grief and bewilderment. Ah, there is something strange in the inner life of a thoughtful child of eight years old ! I would rather see a faithful record of his thoughts, feelings, fancies, and sorrows, for a single week, than know all the political events that have happened during that space in Spain, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Russia, and Turkey. Even amid the great grief at leaving home for school in your early days, did you not feel a greater grief to think that the day might come when you would not care at all ; when your home ties and affections would be outgrown ; when you would be quite content to live on month after month far from parents, sisters, brothers ; and feel hardly a perceptible blank when you remembered that they were far away ? But it is of the essence of such fears, that when the thing comes that you were afraid of it has ceased to be fearful ; still it is with a little pang that you sometimes call to remembrance how much you feared it once. It is a daily regret, though not a very acute one (more's the pity), to be thrown much, in middle life, into the society of an old friend whom as a boy you had regarded as very wise ; and to be compelled to observe that he is a tremendous fool. You struggle with the conviction ; you think it wrong to give in to it : but you cannot help it. But it would have been a sharper pang to the child's heart to have impressed upon the child the

fact, that ‘ Good Mr. Goose is a fool, and some day you will understand that he is.’ In those days one admits no imperfection in the people and the things one likes. You like a person ; and *he is good*. *That* sums the whole case. You do not go into exceptions and reservations. I remember how indignant I felt as a boy, at reading some depreciatory criticism of the *Waverley Novels*. The criticism was to the effect that the plots generally dragged at first, and were huddled up at the end. But to me the novels were enchaining, enthralling ; and to hint a defect in them stunned one. In the boy’s feeling, if a thing be good, why there cannot be anything bad about it. But in the man’s mature judgment, even in the people he likes best, and in the things he appreciates most highly, there are many flaws and imperfections. It does not vex us much now to find that this is so ; but it would have greatly vexed us many years since to have been told that it would be so. I can well imagine that if you told a thoughtful and affectionate child, how well he would some day get on, far from his parents and his home, his wish would be that any evil might befall him rather than that ! We shrink with terror from the prospect of things which we can take easily enough when they come. I dare say Lord Chancellor Thurlow was moderately sincere when he exclaimed in the House of Peers, ‘ When I forget my king, may my God forget me ! ’ And you will understand what Leigh Hunt

128 *Concerning Future Years.*

meant when, in his pleasant poem of *The Palfrey*, he tells us of a daughter who had lost a very bad and heartless father by death, that,

The daughter wept, and wept the more,
To think her tears would soon be o'er.

Even in middle age, one sad thought which comes in the prospect of Future Years is of the change which they are sure to work upon many of our present views and feelings. And the change, in many cases, will be to the worse. One thing is certain, that your temper will grow worse if it do not grow better. Years will sour it, if they do not mellow it. Another certain thing is, that if you do not grow wiser you will be growing more foolish. It is very true that there is no fool so foolish as an old fool. Let us hope, my friend, that whatever be our honest worldly work, it may never lose its interest. We must always speak humbly about the changes which coming time will work upon us, upon even our firmest resolutions and most rooted principles ; or I should say for myself that I cannot even imagine myself the same being, with bent less resolute and heart less warm to that best of all employments which is the occupation of my life. But there are few things which, as we grow older, impress us more deeply, than the transitoriness of thoughts and feelings in human hearts. Nor am I thinking of contemptible people only when I say so. I am not

thinking of the fellow who is pulled up in court in an action for breach of promise of marriage, and who in one letter makes vows of unalterable affection, and in another letter, written a few weeks or months later, tries to wriggle out of his engagement. Nor am I thinking of the weak, though well meaning lady, who devotes herself in succession to a great variety of uneducated and unqualified religious instructors ; who tells you one week how she has joined the flock of Mr. A., the converted prize-fighter, and how she regards him as by far the most improving preacher she ever heard ; and who tells you the next week that she has seen through the prize-fighter, that he has gone and married a wealthy Roman Catholic, and that now she has resolved to wait on the ministry of Mr. B., an enthusiastic individual who makes shoes during the week and gives sermons on Sundays, and in whose addresses she finds exactly what suits her. I speak of the better feelings and purposes of wiser if not better folk. Let me think here of pious emotions and holy resolutions, of the best and purest frames of heart and mind. Oh, if we could all always remain at our best ! And after all, permanence is the great test. In the matter of Christian faith and feeling, in the matter of all our worthier principles and purposes, *that* which lasts longest is best. This indeed is true of most things. The worth of anything depends much upon its durability—upon the

130 *Concerning Future Years.*

wear that is in it. A thing that is merely a fine flash and over, only disappoints. The highest authority has recognised this. You remember Who said to his friends, before leaving them, that He would have them bring forth fruit, and much fruit. But not even *that* was enough. The fairest profession for a time, the most earnest labour for a time, the most ardent affection for a time, would not suffice. And so the Redeemer's words were — 'I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that *your fruit should remain.*' Well, let us trust that in the most solemn of all respects, only progress shall be brought to us by all the changes of Future Years.

But it is quite vain to think that feelings, as distinguished from principles, shall not lose much of their vividness, freshness, and depth, as time goes on. You cannot now by any effort revive the exultation you felt at some unexpected great success, nor the heart-sinking of some terrible loss or trial. You know how women, after the death of a child, determine that every day, as long as they live, they will visit the little grave. And they do so for a time, sometimes for a long time ; but they gradually leave off. You know how burying-places are very trimly and carefully kept at first, and how flowers are hung upon the stone ; but these things gradually cease. You know how many husbands and wives, after their partner's death, determine to give the

remainder of life to the memory of the departed, and would regard with sincere horror the suggestion that it was possible they should ever marry again ; but after a while they do. And you will even find men, beyond middle age, who made a tremendous work at their first wife's death, and wore very conspicuous mourning, who in a very few months may be seen dangling after some new fancy, and who in the prospect of their second marriage evince an exhilaration that approaches to crackiness. It is usual to speak of such things in a ludicrous manner, but I confess the matter seems to me anything but one to laugh at. I think that the rapid dying out of warm feelings, the rapid change of fixed resolutions, is one of the most sorrowful subjects of reflection which it is possible to suggest. Ah, my friends, after we die, it would not be expedient, even if it were possible, to come back. Many of us would not like to find how very little they miss us. But still, it is the manifest intention of the Creator that strong feelings should be transitory. The sorrowful thing is when they pass, and leave absolutely no trace behind them. There should always be some corner kept in the heart for a feeling which once possessed it all. Let us look at the case temperately. Let us face and admit the facts. The healthy body and mind can get over a great deal ; but there are some things which it is not to the credit of our nature should ever be entirely got over. Here are

132 *Concerning Future Years.*

sober truth, and sound philosophy, and sincere feeling together, in the words of Philip van Artevelde :

Well, well, she's gone,
And I have tamed my sorrow. Pain and grief
Are transitory things, no less than joy ;
And though they leave us not the men we were,
Yet they do leave us. You behold me here,
A man bereaved, with something of a blight
Upon the early blossoms of his life,
And its first verdure—having not the less
A living root, and drawing from the earth
Its vital juices, from the air its powers :
And surely as man's heart and strength are whole,
His appetites regerminate, his heart
Re-opens, and his objects and desires
Spring up renewed.

But though Artevelde speaks truly and well, you remember how Mr. Taylor, in that noble play, works out to our view the sad sight of the deterioration of character, the growing coarseness and harshness, the lessening tenderness and kindliness, which are apt to come with advancing years. Great trials, we know, passing over us, may influence us either for the worse or the better ; and unless our nature is a very obdurate and poor one, though they may leave us, they will not leave us the men we were. Once, at a public meeting, I heard a man in eminent station make a speech. I had never seen him before ; but I remembered an inscription which I had read, in a certain churchyard far away, upon the stone that marked the resting-place of his young wife, who had died many years before. I thought of its simple

words of manly and hearty sorrow. I knew that the eminence he had reached had not come till she who would have been proudest of it was beyond knowing it or caring for it. And I cannot say with what interest and satisfaction I thought I could trace, in the features which were sad without the infusion of a grain of sentimentalism, in the subdued and quiet tone of the man's whole aspect and manner and address, the manifest proof that he had not shut down the leaf upon that old page of his history, that he had never quite got over that great grief of earlier years. One felt better and more hopeful for the sight. I suppose many people, after meeting some overwhelming loss or trial, have fancied that they would soon die ; but that is almost invariably a delusion. Various dogs have died of a broken heart, but very few human beings. The inferior creature has pined away at his master's loss ; as for us, it is not that one would doubt the depth and sincerity of sorrow, but that there is more endurance in our constitution, and that God has appointed that grief shall rather mould and influence than kill. It is a much sadder sight than an early death, to see human beings live on after heavy trial, and sink into something very unlike their early selves and very inferior to their early selves. I can well believe that many a human being, if he could have a glimpse in innocent youth of what he will be twenty or thirty years after, would pray in anguish to be

134 *Concerning Future Years.*

taken before coming to *that*! Mansie Wauch's glimpse of destitution was bad enough ; but a million times worse is a glimpse of hardened and unabashed sin and shame. And it would be no comfort—it would be an aggravation in that view—to think that by the time you have reached that miserable point, you will have grown pretty well reconciled to it. *That* is the worst of all. To be wicked and depraved, and to feel it, and to be wretched under it, is bad enough ; but it is a great deal worse to have fallen into that depth of moral degradation, and to feel that really you don't care. The instinct of accommodation is not always a blessing. It is happy for us that though in youth we hoped to live in a castle or a palace, we can make up our mind to live in a little parsonage or a quiet street in a country town. It is happy for us that though in youth we hoped to be very great and famous, we are so entirely reconciled to being little and unknown. But it is not happy for the poor girl who walks the Haymarket at night that she feels her degradation so little. It is not happy that she has come to feel towards her miserable life so differently now from what she would have felt towards it had it been set before her while she was the blooming, thoughtless creature in the little cottage in the country. It is only by fits and starts that the poor drunken wretch, living in a garret upon a little pittance allowed him by his relations, who was once a man of character and

Concerning Future Years. 135

hope, feels what a sad pitch he has come to. If you could get him to feel it constantly, there would be some hope of his reclamation even yet.

It seems to me a very comforting thought, in looking on to Future Years, if you are able to think that you are in a profession or a calling from which you will never retire. For the prospect of a total change in your mode of life, and the entire cessation of the occupation which for many years employed the greater part of your waking thoughts, and all this amid the failing powers and flagging hopes of declining years, is both a sad and a perplexing prospect to a thoughtful person. For such a person cannot regard this great change simply in the light of a rest from toil and worry; he will know quite well what a blankness, and listlessness, and loss of interest in life will come of feeling all at once that you have nothing at all to do. And so it is a great blessing if your vocation be one which is a dignified and befitting one for an old man to be engaged in; one that beseems his gravity and his long experience; one that beseems even his slow movements and his white hairs. It is a pleasant thing to see an old man a judge; his years become the judgment-seat. But then the old man can hold such an office only while he retains strength of body and mind efficiently to perform its duties; and he must do all his work for himself; and accordingly

a day must come when the venerable Chancellor resigns the Great Seal; when the aged Justice or Baron must give up his place; and when these honoured judges, though still retaining considerable vigour, but vigour less than enough for their hard work, are compelled to feel that their occupation is gone. And accordingly I hold that what is the best of all professions, for many reasons, is especially so for this, that you need never retire from it. In the Church you need not do all your duty yourself. You may get assistance to supplement your own lessening strength. The energetic young curate or curates may do that part of the parish work which exceeds the power of the ageing incumbent, while the entire parochial machinery has still the advantage of being directed by his wisdom and experience; and while the old man is still permitted to do what he can with such strength as is spared to him, and to feel that he is useful in the noblest cause yet. And even to extremest age and frailty—to age and frailty which would long since have incapacitated the judge for the Bench—the parish clergyman may take some share in the much-loved duty in which he has laboured so long. He may still, though briefly, and only now and then, address his flock from the pulpit, in words which his very feebleness will make far more touchingly effective than the most vigorous eloquence and the richest and fullest tones of his young coadjutors. There never will be, within the

sacred walls, a silence and reverence more profound, than when the withered kindly face looks as of old upon the congregation, to whose fathers its owner first ministered, and which has grown up mainly under his instruction; and when the voice that falls familiarly on so many ears, tells again, quietly and earnestly, the old story which we all need so much to hear. And he may still look in at the parish school, and watch the growth of a generation that is to do the work of life when he is in his grave: and kindly smooth the children's heads; and tell them how One, once a little child, and never more than a young man, brought salvation alike to young and old. He may still sit by the bedside of the sick and dying, and speak to such with the sympathy and the solemnity of one who does not forget that the last great realities are drawing near to both. But there are vocations which are all very well for young or middle-aged people, but which do not quite suit the old. Such is that of the barrister. Wrangling and hair-splitting, browbeating and bewildering witnesses, making coarse jokes to excite the laughter of common jurymen, and addressing such with clap-trap bellowings, are not the work for grey-headed men. If such remain at the bar, rather let them have the more refined work of the Equity Courts, where you address judges and not juries; and where you spare clap-trap and misrepresentation, if for no better reason, because you know that these will not

138 *Concerning Future Years:*

stand you in the slightest stead. The work which best befits the aged, the work for which no mortal can ever become too venerable and dignified, or too weak and frail, is the work of Christian usefulness and philanthropy. And it is a beautiful sight to see, as I trust we all have seen, *that* work persevered in with the closing energies of life. It is a noble test of the soundness of the principle that prompted to its first undertaking. It is a hopeful and cheering sight to younger men, looking out with something of fear to the temptations and trials of the years before them. Oh! if the grey-haired clergyman, with less now indeed of physical strength and mere physical warmth, yet preaches, with the added weight and solemnity of his long experience, the same blessed doctrines now, after forty years, that he preached in his early prime; if the philanthropist of half a century since is the philanthropist still—still kind, hopeful, and unwearied, though with the snows of age upon his head, and the hand that never told its fellow of what it did, now trembling as it does the deed of mercy—then I think that even the most doubtful will believe that the principle and the religion of such men were a glorious reality! The sternest of all touchstones of the genuineness of our better feelings, is the fashion in which they stand the wear of years.

But my shortening space warns me to stop; and

Concerning Future Years. 139

I must cease, for the present, from these thoughts of Future Years. Cease, I mean, from writing about that mysterious tract before us; who can cease from thinking of it? You remember how the writer of that little poem which has been quoted asks Time to touch gently him and his. Of course he spoke as a poet, stating the case fancifully; but not forgetting that when we come to sober sense, we must prefer our requests to an Ear more ready to hear us, and a Hand more ready to help. It is not to Time that I shall apply to lead me through life into immortality! And I cannot think of years to come without going back to a greater poet, whom we need not esteem the less because his inspiration was loftier than that of the Muses, who has summed up so grandly in one comprehensive sentence all the possibilities which could befall *him* in the days and ages before him. 'Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory!' Let us humbly trust that in that sketch, round and complete, of all that can ever come to us, my readers and I may be able to read the history of our Future Years!

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING THINGS SLOWLY LEARNT.

YOU will see in a little while what sort of things they are which I understand by *Things Slowly Learnt*. Some are facts, some are moral truths, some are practical lessons; but the great characteristic of all those which are to be thought of in this essay, is, that we have to learn them and act upon them in the face of a strong bias to think or act in an opposite way. It is not that they are so difficult in themselves: not that they are hard to be understood, or that they are supported by arguments whose force is not apparent to every mind. On the contrary, the things which I have especially in view are very simple, and for the most part quite unquestionable. But the difficulty of learning them lies in this: that, as regards them, the head seems to say one thing and the heart another. We see plainly enough what we ought to think or to do; but we feel an irresistible inclination to think or to do something else. It is about three or four of

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 141

these things that we are going, my friend, to have a little quiet talk. We are going to confine our view to a single class, though possibly the most important class, in the innumerable multitude of Things Slowly Learnt.

The truth is, a great many things are slowly learnt. I have lately had occasion to observe that the Alphabet is one of these. I remember, too, in my own sorrowful experience, how the Multiplication Table was another. A good many years since, an eminent dancing-master undertook to teach a number of my schoolboy companions a graceful and easy deportment; but comparatively few of us can be said as yet to have thoroughly attained it. I know men who have been practising the art of extempore speaking for many years, but who have reached no perfection in it, and who, if one may judge from their confusion and hesitation when they attempt to speak, are not likely ever to reach even decent mediocrity in that wonderful accomplishment. Analogous statements might be made with truth, with regard to my friend Mr. Snarling's endeavours to produce magazine articles; likewise concerning his attempts to skate, and his efforts to ride on horseback unlike a tailor. Some folk learn with remarkable slowness that nature never intended them for wits. There have been men who have punned, ever more and more wretchedly, to the end of a long and highly respectable life. People submitted in silence to the

142 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

infliction ; no one liked to inform those reputable individuals that they had better cease to make fools of themselves. This, however, is part of a larger subject, which shall be treated hereafter. On the other hand, there are things which are very quickly learnt ; which are learnt by a single lesson. One liberal tip, or even a few kind words heartily said, to a manly little schoolboy, will establish in his mind the rooted principle that the speaker of the words or the bestower of the tip is a jolly and noble specimen of humankind. Boys are great physiognomists : they read a man's nature at a glance. Well I remember how, when going to and from school, a long journey of four hundred miles, in days when such a journey implied travel by sea as well as by land, I used to know instantly the gentleman or the railway officials to whom I might apply for advice or information. I think that this intuitive perception of character is blunted in after years. A man is often mistaken in his first impression of man or woman ; a boy hardly ever. And a boy not only knows at once whether a human being is amiable or the reverse ; he knows also whether the human being is wise or foolish. In particular, he knows at once whether the human being always means what he says, or says a great deal more than he means. Inferior animals learn some lessons quickly. A dog once thrashed for some offence, knows quite well not to repeat it. A horse turns for the first time down

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 143

the avenue to a house where he is well fed and cared for ; next week, or next month, you pass that gate, and though the horse has been long taught to submit his will to yours, you can easily see that he knows the place again, and that he would like to go back to the stable with which, in his poor, dull, narrow mind, there are pleasant associations. I would give a good deal to know what a horse is thinking about. There is something very curious and very touching about the limited intelligence and the imperfect knowledge of that immaterial principle, in which the immaterial does not imply the immortal. And yet, if we are to rest the doctrine of a future life in any degree upon the necessity of compensation of the sufferings and injustice of a present, I think the sight of the cab horses of any large town might plead for the admission of some quiet world of green grass and shady trees, where there should be no cold, starvation, over-work, or flogging. Some one has said that the most exquisite material scenery would look very cold and dead in the entire absence of irrational life. Trees suggest singing-birds ; flowers and sunshine make us think of the drowsy bees. And it is curious to think how the future worlds of various creeds are described as not without their lowly population of animals inferior to man. We know what the 'poor Indian' expects shall bear him company in his humble heaven ; and possibly various readers may know some

144 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt*

dogs who in certain important respects are very superior to certain men. You remember how, when a war-chief of the Western woods was laid by his tribe in his grave, his horse was led to the spot in the funeral procession; and at the instant when the earth was cast upon the dead warrior's dust, an arrow reached the noble creature's heart, that in the land of souls the man should find his old friend again. And though it has something of the grotesque, I think it has more of the pathetic, the aged huntsman of Mr. Assheton Smith desiring to be buried by his master, with two horses and a few couples of dogs, that they might all be ready to start together when they meet again far away.

This is a deviation; but *that* is of no consequence. It is of the essence of the present writer's essays to deviate from the track. Only we must not forget the thread of the discourse: and after our deviation we must go back to it. All this came of our remarking that some things are very quickly learnt; and that certain inferior classes of our fellow-creatures learn them quickly. But deeper and larger lessons are early learnt. Thoughtful children of a very few years old, have their own theory of human nature. Before studying the metaphysicians, and indeed while still imperfectly acquainted with their letters, young children have glimpses of the inherent selfishness of humanity. I was recently present when a small boy of three years old, together with

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 145

his sister, aged five, was brought down to the dining-room at the period of dessert. The small boy climbed upon his mother's knee, and began by various indications to display his affection for her. A stranger remarked what an affectionate child he was. 'Oh,' said the little girl, 'he suspects (by which she meant *expects*) that he is going to get something to eat !' Not Hobbes himself had reached a clearer perception or a firmer belief of the selfish system in moral philosophy. 'He is always very affectionate,' the youthful philosopher proceeded, 'when he suspects he is going to get something good to eat !'

By *Things Slowly Learnt*, I mean not merely things which are in their nature such that it takes a long time to learn them ; such as the Greek language, or the law of vendors and purchasers. These things indeed take long time and much trouble to learn ; but once you have learnt them, you know them. Once you have come to understand the force of the second aorist, you do not find your heart whispering to you as you are lying awake at night, that what the grammar says about the second aorist is all nonsense ; you do not feel an inveterate disposition, gaining force day by day, to think concerning the second aorist just the opposite of what the grammar says. By *Things Slowly Learnt*, I understand things which it is very hard to learn at the

146 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

first, because strong as the reasons which support them are, you find it so hard to make up your mind to them. I understand things which you can quite easily (when it is fairly put to you) see to be true ; but which it seems as if it would change the very world you live in to accept. I understand things you discern to be true, but which you have all your life been accustomed to think false ; and which you are extremely anxious to think false. And by *Things Slowly Learnt* I understand things which are not merely very hard to learn at the first ; but which it is not enough to learn for once, ever so well. I understand things which, when you have made the bitter effort, and admitted them to be true and certain, you put into your mind to keep (so to speak) ; and hardly a day has passed when a soft quiet hand seems to begin to crumble them down and to wear them away to nothing. You write the principle which was so hard to receive, upon the tablet of your memory ; and day by day a gentle hand comes over it with a bit of india-rubber, till the inscription loses its clear sharpness, grows blurred and indistinct, and finally quite disappears. Nor is the gentle hand content even then ; but it begins, very faintly at first, to trace letters which bear a very different meaning. Then it deepens and darkens these day by day, week by week, till a month's or a year's end the tablet of memory bears in great, sharp, legible letters, just the opposite thing to that which

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 147

you had originally written down there. These are my *Things Slowly Learnt*. Things you learn at first in the face of a strong bias against them ; things which when once taught you gradually forget, till you come back again to your old way of thinking. Such things, of course, lie within the realm to which extends the influence of feeling and prejudice. They are things in the accepting of which both head and heart are concerned. Once convince a man that two and two make four, and he learns the truth without excitement, and he never doubts it again. But prove to a man that he is of much less importance than he has been accustomed to think ; or prove to a woman that her children are very much like those of other folk ; or prove to the inhabitant of a country parish that Britain has hundreds of parishes which in soil, and climate, and productions, are just as good as his own ; or prove to the great man of a little country town that there are scores of towns in this world where the walks are as pleasant, the streets as well paved, and the population as healthy and as well conducted ; and in each such case you will find it very hard to convince the individual at the time, and you will find that in a very short space the individual has succeeded in entirely escaping from the disagreeable conviction. You may possibly find, if you endeavour to instil such belief into minds of but moderate cultivation, that your arguments will be met less by force of reason than

148 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

by roaring of voice and excitement of manner ; you may find that the person you address will endeavour to change the issue you are arguing, to other issues, wholly irrelevant, touching your own antecedents, character, or even personal appearance ; and you may afterwards be informed by good-natured friends, that the upshot of your discussion had been to leave on the mind of your acquaintance the firm conviction that you yourself are intellectually a blockhead, and morally a villain. And even when dealing with human beings who have reached that crowning result of a fine training, that they shall have got beyond thinking a man their ‘ enemy because he tells them the truth,’ you may find that you have rendered a service like that rendered by the surgeon’s amputating knife—salutary, yet very painful—and leaving for ever a sad association with your thought and your name. For among the things we slowly learn, are truths and lessons which it goes terribly against the grain to learn at first ; which must be driven into us time after time ; and which perhaps are never learnt completely.

One thing very slowly learnt by most human beings, is, that they are of no earthly consequence beyond a very small circle indeed ; and that really nobody is thinking or talking about them. Almost all commonplace men and women in this world have a vague but deeply-rooted belief that they are quite

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 149

different from anybody else, and of course quite superior to everybody else. It may be in only one respect they fancy they are this, but that one respect is quite sufficient. I believe that if a grocer or silk-mercer in a little town has a hundred customers, each separate customer lives on under the impression that the grocer or the silk-mercer is prepared to give to him or her certain advantages in buying and selling which will not be accorded to the other ninety-nine customers. 'Say it is for Mrs. Brown,' is Mrs. Brown's direction to her servant when sending for some sugar; 'say it is for Mrs. Brown, and he will give it a little better.' The grocer, keenly alive to the weaknesses of his fellow-creatures, encourages this notion. 'This tea,' he says, 'would be four-and-sixpence a pound *to any one else*, but *to you* it is only four-and-threepence.' Judging from my own observation, I should say that retail dealers trade a good deal upon this singular fact in the constitution of the human mind, that it is inexpressibly bitter to most people to believe that they stand on the ordinary level of humanity; that, in the main, they are just like their neighbours. Mrs. Brown would be filled with unutterable wrath if it were represented to her that the grocer treats her precisely as he does Mrs. Smith, who lives on one side of her, and Mrs. Snooks, who lives on the other. She would be still more angry if you asked her what earthly reason there is why she should in any

150 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

way be distinguished beyond Mrs. Snooks and Mrs. Smith. She takes for granted she is quite different from them : quite superior to them. Human beings do not like to be classed, at least with the class to which in fact they belong. To be classed at all is painful to an average mortal, who firmly believes that there never was such a being in this world. I remember one of the cleverest friends I have—one who assuredly cannot be classed intellectually, except in a very small and elevated class—telling me how mortified he was, when a very clever boy of sixteen, at being classed at all. He had told a literary lady that he admired Tennyson. ‘Yes,’ said the lady, ‘I am not surprised at that : there is a class of young men who like Tennyson at your age.’ It went like a dart to my friend’s heart. *Class of young men*, indeed ! Was it for *this* that I outstripped all competitors at school, that I have been fancying myself an unique phenomenon in nature, *different* at least from every other being that lives, that I should be spoken of as one of *a class of young men* ! Now, in my friend’s half-playful reminiscence, I see the exemplification of a great fact in human nature. Most human beings fancy themselves, and all their belongings, to be quite different from all other beings, and the belongings of all other beings. I heard an old lady, whose son is a rifleman, and just like all the other volunteers of his corps, lately declare that on the occasion of a certain grand

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 151

Review her Tom looked so entirely different from all the rest. No doubt he did to her, poor old lady, for he was her own. But the irritating thing was that the old lady wished it to be admitted that Tom's superiority was an actual fact, equally patent to the eyes of all mankind. Yes, my friend : it is a thing very slowly learnt by most men, that they are very much like other people. You see the principle which underlies what you hear so often said by human beings, young and old, when urging you to do something which it is against your general rule to do. 'Oh, but you might do it *for me!*' Why for you more than for any one else, would be the answer of severe logic. But a kindly man would not take that ground : for doubtless the *Me*, however little to every one else, is to each unit in human-kind the centre of all the world.

Arising out of this mistaken notion of their own difference from all other men, is the fancy entertained by many, that they occupy a much greater space in the thoughts of others than they really do. Most folk think mainly about themselves and their own affairs. Even a matter which 'everybody is talking about,' is really talked about by each for a very small portion of the twenty-four hours. And a name which is 'in everybody's mouth,' is not in each separate mouth for more than a few minutes at a time. And during those few minutes, it is talked of with an interest very faint when compared with

152 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

that you feel for yourself. You fancy it a terrible thing when you yourself have to do something which you would think nothing about if done by anybody else. A lady grows sick, and has to go out of church during the sermon. Well, you remark it; possibly indeed you don't; and you say, Mrs. Thomson went out of church to-day; she must be ill; and there the matter ends. But a day or two later you see Mrs. Thomson, and find her quite in a fever at the awful fact. It was a dreadful trial, walking out, and facing all the congregation: they must have thought it so strange; she would not run the risk of it again for any inducement. The fact is just this: Mrs. Thomson thinks a great deal of the thing, because it happened to herself. It did not happen to the other people, and so they hardly think of it at all. But nine in every ten of them, in Mrs. Thomson's place, would have Mrs. Thomson's feeling; for it is a thing which you, my reader, slowly learn, that people think very little about you.

Yes, it is a thing slowly learnt: by many not learnt at all. How many persons you meet walking along the street who evidently think that everybody is looking at them! How few persons can walk through an exhibition of pictures at which are assembled the grand people of the town and all their own grand acquaintances, in a fashion thoroughly free from self-consciousness! I mean without thinking of themselves at all, or of how they look; but in an

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 153

unaffected manner, observing the objects and beings around them. Men who have attained recently to a moderate eminence, are sometimes, if of small minds, much affected by this disagreeable frailty. Small literary men, and preachers with no great head or heart, have within my own observation suffered from it severely. I have witnessed a poet, whose writings I have never read, walking along a certain street. I call him a poet to avoid periphrasis. The whole get-up of the man, his dress, his hair, his hat, the style in which he walked, showed unmistakeably that he fancied that everybody was looking at him, and that he was the admired of all admirers. In fact, nobody was looking at him at all. Some time since I beheld a portrait of a very, very small literary man. It was easy to discern from it that the small author lives in the belief that wherever he goes he is the object of universal observation. The intense self-consciousness and self-conceit apparent in that portrait were, in the words of Mr. Squeers, 'more easier conceived than described.' The face was a very commonplace and rather good-looking one : the author, notwithstanding his most strenuous exertions, evidently could make nothing of the features to distinguish him from other men. But the length of his hair was very great ; and oh, what genius he plainly fancied glowed in those eyes ! I never in my life witnessed such an extraordinary glare. I do not believe that any human being

154 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

ever lived whose eyes habitually wore that expression: only by a violent effort could the expression be produced; and then for a very short time, without serious injury to the optic nerves. The eyes were made as large as possible; and the thing after which the poor fellow had been struggling was that peculiar look which may be conceived to penetrate through the beholder, and pierce his inmost thoughts. I never beheld the living original, but if I saw him I should like in a kind way to pat him on the head, and tell him that *that* sort of expression would produce a great effect on the gallery of a minor theatre. The other day I was at a public meeting. A great crowd of people was assembled in a large hall: the platform at one end of it remained unoccupied till the moment when the business of the meeting was to begin. It was an interesting sight for any philosophic observer seated in the body of the hall to look at the men who by and bye walked in procession on to the platform, and to observe the different ways in which they walked in. There were several very great and distinguished men: every one of these walked on to the platform and took his seat in the most simple and unaffected way, as if quite unconscious of the many eyes that were looking at them with interest and curiosity. There were many highly respectable and sensible men, whom nobody cared particularly to see, and who took their places in a perfectly natural manner, as though well aware

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 155

of the fact. But there were one or two small men, struggling for notoriety ; and I declare it was pitiful to behold their entrance. I remarked one in particular, who evidently thought that the eyes of the whole meeting were fixed upon himself ; and that as he walked in everybody was turning to his neighbour, and saying with agitation, ‘See, that’s Snooks!’ His whole gait and deportment testified that he felt that two or three thousand eyes were burning him up : you saw it in the way he walked to his place, in the way he sat down, in the way he then looked about him. If any one had tried to get up three cheers for Snooks, Snooks would not have known that he was being made a fool of. He would have accepted the incense of fame as justly his due. There once was a man who entered the Edinburgh theatre at the same instant with Sir Walter Scott. The audience cheered lustily ; and while Sir Walter modestly took his seat, as though unaware that those cheers were to welcome the Great Magician, the other man advanced with dignity to the front of the box, and bowed in acknowledgment of the popular applause. This of course was but a little outburst of the great tide of vain self-estimation which the man had cherished within his breast for years. Let it be said here, that an affected unconsciousness of the presence of a multitude of people is as offensive an exhibition of self-consciousness as any that is possible. Entire naturalness, and a just

156 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

sense of a man's personal insignificance, will produce the right deportment. It is very irritating to see some clergymen walk into church to begin the service. They come in with eyes affectedly cast down, and go to their place without ever looking up, and rise and begin without one glance at the congregation. To stare about them as some clergymen do, in a free and easy manner, befits not the solemnity of the place and the worship; but the other is the worse thing. In a few cases it proceeds from modesty: in the majority from intolerable self-conceit. The man who keeps his eyes downcast in that affected manner fancies that everybody is looking at him. There is an insufferable self-consciousness about him; and he is much more keenly aware of the presence of other people than the man who does what is natural, and looks at the people to whom he is speaking. It is not natural nor rational to speak to one human being with your eyes fixed on the ground; and neither is it natural or rational to speak to a thousand. And I think that the preacher who feels in his heart that he is neither wiser nor better than his fellow sinners to whom he is to preach, and that the advices he addresses to them are addressed quite as solemnly to himself, will assume no conceited airs of elevation above them, but will unconsciously wear the demeanour of any sincere worshipper, somewhat deepened in solemnity by the remembrance of his heavy personal respon-

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 157

sibility in leading the congregation's worship ; but assuredly and entirely free from the vulgar conceit which may be fostered in a vulgar mind by the reflection, 'Now everybody is looking at me !' I have seen, I regret to say, various distinguished preachers whose pulpit demeanour was made to me inexpressibly offensive by this taint of self-consciousness. And I have seen some, with half the talent, who made upon me an impression a thousand-fold deeper than ever was made by the most brilliant eloquence ; because the simple earnestness of their manner said to every heart, 'Now, I am not thinking in the least about myself, or about what you may think of me : my sole desire is to impress on your hearts these truths I speak, which I believe will concern us all for ever !' I have heard great preachers, after hearing whom you could walk home quite at your ease, praising warmly the eloquence and the logic of the sermon. I have heard others (infinitely greater in my poor judgment) after hearing whom you would have felt it profanation to criticise the literary merits of their sermon, high as those were : but you walked home thinking of the lesson and not of the teacher ; solemnly revolving the truths you had heard ; and asking the best of all help to enable you to remember them and act upon them.

There are various ways in which self-consciousness disagreeably evinces its existence ; and there is not one perhaps more disagreeable than the affected

158 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

avoidance of what is generally regarded as egotism. Depend upon it, my reader, that the straightforward and natural writer who frankly uses the first person singular, and says, 'I think thus and thus,' 'I have seen so and so,' is thinking of himself and his own personality a mighty deal less than the man who is always employing awkward and roundabout forms of expression to avoid the use of the obnoxious *I*. Every such periphrasis testifies unmistakeably that the man was thinking of himself; but the simple, natural writer, warm with his subject, eager to press his views upon his readers, uses the *I* without a thought of self, just because it is the shortest, most direct, and most natural way of expressing himself. The recollection of his own personality probably never once crossed his mind during the composition of the paragraph from which an illset critic might pick out a score of *I*'s. To say 'It is submitted' instead of 'I think,' 'It has been observed' instead of 'I have seen,' 'the present writer' instead of '*I*,' is much the more really egotistical. Try to write an essay without using that vowel which some men think the very shibboleth of egotism, and the remembrance of yourself will be in the background of your mind all the time you are writing. It will be always intruding and pushing in its face, and you will be able to give only half your mind to your subject. But frankly and naturally use the '*I*,' and the remembrance of yourself vanishes. You are

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 159

grappling with the subject ; you are thinking of it and of nothing else. You use the readiest and most unaffected mode of speech to set out your thoughts of it. You have written *I* a dozen times, but you have not thought of yourself once.

You may see the self-consciousness of some men strongly manifested in their handwriting. The handwriting of some men is essentially affected ; more especially their signature. It seems to be a very searching test whether a man is a conceited person or an unaffected person, to be required to furnish his autograph to be printed underneath his published portrait. I have fancied I could form a theory of a man's whole character from reading, in such a situation, merely the words ' Very faithfully yours, Eusebius Snooks.' You could see that Mr. Snooks was acting when he wrote that signature. He was thinking of the impression it would produce on those who saw it. It was not the thing which a man would produce who simply wished to write his name legibly in as short a time and with as little needless trouble as possible. Let me say with sorrow that I have known even venerable bishops who were not superior to this irritating weakness. Some men aim at an aristocratic hand ; some deal in vulgar flourishes. These are the men who have reached no further than that stage at which they are proud of the dexterity with which they handle their pen. Some strive after an affectedly simple and student-like

160 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

hand ; some at a dashing and military style. But there may be as much self-consciousness evinced by handwriting as by anything else. Any clergyman who performs a good many marriages will be impressed by the fact that very few among the humbler classes can sign their name in an unaffected way. I am not thinking of the poor bride who shakily traces her name, nor of the simple bumpkin who slowly writes his, making no secret of the difficulty with which he does it. These are natural and pleasing. You would like to help and encourage them. But it is irritating when some forward fellow, after evincing his marked contempt for the slow and cramped performances of his friends, jauntily takes up the pen and dashes off his signature at a tremendous rate and with the air of an exploit, evidently expecting the admiration of his rustic friends, and laying a foundation for remarking to them on his way home that the parson could not touch him at penmanship. I have observed with a little malicious satisfaction that such persons, arising in their pride from the place where they wrote, generally smear their signature with their coat-sleeve, and reduce it to a state of comparative illegibility. I like to see the smirking, impudent creature a little taken down.

But it is endless to try to reckon up the fashions in which people show that they have not learnt the lesson of their own unimportance. Did you ever

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 161

stop in the street and talk for a few minutes to some old bachelor? If so, I dare say you have remarked a curious phenomenon. You have found that all of a sudden the mind of the old gentleman, usually reasonable enough, appeared stricken into a state approaching idiocy, and that the sentence which he had begun in a rational and intelligible way was ending in a maze of wandering words, signifying nothing in particular. You had been looking in another direction, but in sudden alarm you look straight at the old gentleman to see what on earth is the matter; and you discern that his eyes are fixed on some passer-by, possibly a young lady, perhaps no more than a magistrate or the like, who is by this time a good many yards off, with the eyes still following, and slowly revolving on their axis so as to follow without the head being turned round. It is this spectacle which has drawn off your friend's attention; and you notice his whole figure twisted into an ungainly form, intended to be dignified or easy, and assumed because he fancied that the passer-by was looking at him. Oh the pettiness of human nature! Then you will find people afraid that they have given offence by saying or doing things which the party they suppose offended had really never observed that they had said or done. There are people who fancy that in church everybody is looking at them, when in truth no mortal is taking the trouble to do so. It is an amusing though irritating

162 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

sight to behold a weak-minded lady walking into church and taking her seat under this delusion. You remember the affected air, the downcast eyes, the demeanour intended to imply a modest shrinking from notice, but through which there shines the real desire, 'Oh, for any sake, look at me!' There are people whose voice is utterly inaudible in church six feet off, who will tell you that a whole congregation of a thousand or fifteen hundred people was listening to their singing. Such folk will tell you that they went to a church where the singing was left too much to the choir, and began to sing as usual, on which the entire congregation looked round to see who it was that was singing, and ultimately proceeded to sing lustily too. I do not remember a more disgusting exhibition of vulgar self-conceit than I saw a few months ago at Westminster Abbey. It was a week-day afternoon service, and the congregation was small. Immediately before me there sat an insolent boor, who evidently did not belong to the Church of England. He had walked in when the prayers were half over, having with difficulty been made to take off his hat, and his manifest wish was to testify his contempt for the whole place and service. Accordingly he persisted in sitting, in a lounging attitude, when the people stood, and in standing up and staring about with an air of curiosity while they knelt. He was very anxious to convey that he was not listening to the prayers ; but

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 163

rather inconsistently he now and then uttered an audible grunt of disapproval. No one can enjoy the choral service more than I do, and the music that afternoon was very fine ; but I could not enjoy it or join in it as I wished for the disgust I felt at the animal before me, and for my burning desire to see him turned out of the sacred place he was profaning. But the thing which chiefly struck me about the individual was not his vulgar and impudent profanity ; it was his intolerable self-conceit. He plainly thought that every eye under the noble old roof was watching all his movements. I could see that he would go home and boast of what he had done ; and tell his friends that all the clergy, choristers, and congregation had been awe-stricken by him, and that possibly word had by this time been conveyed to Lambeth or Fulham of the weakened influence and approaching downfall of the Church of England. I knew that the very thing he wished for was that some one should rebuke his conduct, otherwise I should certainly have told him either to behave with decency or to be gone.

I have sometimes witnessed a curious manifestation of this vain sense of self-importance. Did you ever, my reader, chance upon such a spectacle as this : a very commonplace man, and even a very great blockhead, standing in a drawing-room where a large party of people is assembled, with a grin of self-complacent superiority upon his unmeaning face?

164 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

I am sure you understand the thing I mean. I mean a look which conveyed that, in virtue of some hidden store of genius or power, he could survey with a calm, cynical loftiness, the little conversation and interests of ordinary mortals. You know the kind of interest with which a human being would survey the distant approaches to reason of an intelligent dog, or a colony of ants. I have seen this expression on the face of one or two of the greatest blockheads I ever knew. I have seen such a one wear it while clever men were carrying on a conversation in which he could not have joined to have saved his life. Yet you could see that (who can tell how?) the poor creature had somehow persuaded himself that he occupied a position from which he could look down upon his fellow-men in general. Or was it rather that the poor creature knew he was a fool, and fancied that thus he could disguise the fact? I daresay there was a mixture of both feelings.

You may see many indications of vain self-importance in the fact that various persons, old ladies for the most part, are so ready to give opinions which are not wanted, on matters of which they are not competent to judge. Clever young curates suffer much annoyance from these people: they are always anxious to instruct the young curates how to preach. I remember well, ten years ago, when I was a curate (which in Scotland we call an *assistant*) myself, what advices I used to receive (quite unsought by me)

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 165

from well-meaning but densely stupid old ladies. I did not think the advices worth much, even then ; and now, by longer experience, I can discern that they were utterly idiotic. Yet they were given with entire confidence. No thought ever entered the head of these well-meaning but stupid individuals, that possibly they were not competent to give advice on such subjects. And it is vexatious to think that people so stupid may do serious harm to a young clergyman, by head-shakings and sly inuendos as to his orthodoxy or his gravity of deportment. In the long run they will do no harm, but at the first start they may do a good deal of mischief. Not long since, such a person complained to me that a talented young preacher had taught unsound doctrine. She cited his words. I showed her that the words were taken *verbatim* from the *Confession of Faith*, which is our Scotch Thirty-nine Articles. I think it not unlikely that she would go on telling her tattling story just the same. I remember hearing a stupid old lady say, as though her opinion were quite decisive of the question, that no clergyman ought to have so much as a thousand a year ; for if he had, he would be sure to neglect his duty. You remember what Dr. Johnson said to a woman who expressed some opinion or other upon a matter she did not understand. ‘Madam,’ said the moralist, ‘before expressing your opinion, you should consider what your opinion is worth.’ But this shaft

166 *Concerning Things Slowly Lent.*

would have glanced harmlessly from off the panoply of the stupid and self-complacent old lady of whom I am thinking. It was a fundamental axiom with her that her opinion was entirely infallible. Some people would feel as though the very world were crumbling away under their feet, if they realized the fact that they could go wrong.

Let it here be said, that this vain belief of their own importance which most people cherish, is not at all a source of unmixed happiness. It will work either way. When my friend, Mr. Snarling, got his beautiful poem printed in the county newspaper, it no doubt pleased him to think, as he walked along the street, that every one was pointing him out as the eminent literary man who was the pride of the district; and that the whole town was ringing with that magnificent effusion. Mr. Tennyson, it is certain, felt that his crown was being reft away. But on the other hand, there is no commoner form of morbid misery than that of the poor nervous man or woman who fancies that he or she is the subject of universal unkindly remark. You will find people, still sane for practical purposes, who think that the whole neighbourhood is conspiring against them, when in fact nobody is thinking of them.

All these pages have been spent in discussing a single thing slowly learnt: the remaining matters to be considered in this essay must be treated briefly.

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 167

Another thing slowly learnt is that we have no reason or right to be angry with people because they think poorly of us. This is a truth which most people find it very hard to accept; and at which, probably, very few arrive without pretty long thought and experience. Most people are angry when they are informed that some one has said that their ability is small, or that their proficiency in any art is limited. Mrs. Malaprop was very indignant when she found that some of her friends had spoken lightly of her parts of speech. Mr. Snarling was wroth when he learned that Mr. Jollikin thought him no great preacher. Miss Brown was so on hearing that Mr. Smith did not admire her singing; and Mr. Smith on learning that Miss Brown did not admire his horsemanship. Some authors feel angry on reading an unfavourable review of their book. The present writer has been treated very, very kindly by the critics; far more so than he ever deserved; yet he remembers showing a notice of him which was intended to extinguish him for all coming time, to a warm-hearted friend, who read it with gathering wrath, and vehemently starting up at its close, exclaimed (we knew who wrote the notice) ‘Now, I shall go straight and kick that fellow!’ Now all this is very natural; but assuredly it is quite wrong. You understand, of course, that I am thinking of unfavourable opinions of you, honestly held, and expressed without malice. I do not mean

168 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

- to say that you would choose for your special friend or companion one who thought meanly of your ability or your sense ; it would not be pleasant to have him always by you ; and the very fact of his presence would tend to keep you from doing justice to yourself. For it is true, that when with people who think you very clever and wise, you really are a good deal cleverer and wiser than usual ; while with people who think you stupid and silly, you find yourself under a malign influence which tends to make you actually so for the time. If you want a man to gain any good quality, the way is to give him credit for possessing it. If he has but little, give him credit for all he has, at least ; and you will find him daily get more. You know how Arnold made boys truthful ; it was by giving them credit for truth. Oh that we all fitly understood that the same grand principle should be extended to all good qualities, intellectual and moral ! Diligently instil into a boy that he is a stupid, idle, bad-hearted blockhead, and you are very likely to make him all *that*. And so you can see that it is not judicious to choose for a special friend and associate one who thinks poorly of one's sense or one's parts. Indeed, if such a one honestly thinks poorly of you, and has any moral earnestness, you could not get him for a special friend if you wished it. Let us choose for our companions (if such can be found) those who think well and kindly of us, even though we may

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 169

know within ourselves that they think too kindly and too well. For that favourable estimation will bring out and foster all that is good in us. There is between this and the unfavourable judgment all the difference between the warm, genial sunshine, that draws forth the flowers and encourages them to open their leaves, and the nipping frost or the blighting east-wind that represses and disheartens all vegetable life. But though thus you would not choose for your special companion one who thinks poorly of you, and though you might not even wish to see him very often, you have no reason to have any angry feeling towards him. He cannot help his opinion. His opinion is determined by his lights. His opinion, possibly, founds on those æsthetic considerations as to which people will never think alike, with which there is no reasoning, and for which there is no accounting. God has made him so that he dislikes your book, or at least cannot heartily appreciate it; and that is not his fault. And, holding his opinion, he is quite entitled to express it. It may not be polite to express it to yourself. By common consent it is understood that you are never, except in cases of absolute necessity, to say to any man that which is disagreeable to him. And if you go, and, without any call to do so, express to a man himself that you think poorly of him, he may justly complain, not of your unfavourable opinion of him, but of the malice which is implied in your needlessly

170 *Concerning Thing Slowly Learnt.*

informing him of it. But if any one expresses such an unfavourable opinion of you in your absence, and some one comes and repeats it to you, be angry with the person who repeats the opinion to you, not with the person who expressed it. For what you do not know will cause you no pain. And all sensible folk, aware how estimates of any mortal must differ, will, in the long run, attach nearly the just weight to any opinion, favourable or unfavourable.

Yes, my friend, utterly put down the natural tendency in your heart to be angry with the man who thinks poorly of you. For you have, in sober reason, no right to be angry with him. It is more pleasant, and indeed more profitable, to live among those who think highly of you. It makes you better. You actually grow into what you get credit for. Oh how much better a clergyman preaches to his own congregation, who listen with kindly and sympathetic attention to all he says, and always think too well of him, than to a set of critical strangers, eager to find faults and to pick holes ! And how heartily and pleasantly the essayist covers his pages, which are to go into a magazine whose readers have come to know him well, and to bear with all his ways ! If every one thought him a dull and stupid person, he could not write at all. Indeed, he would bow to the general belief, and accept the truth that he is dull and stupid. But further, my reader, let us be reasonable when it is pleasant ; and

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 171

let us sometimes be irrational when *that* is pleasant too. It is natural to have a very kindly feeling to those who think well of us. Now, though, in severe truth, we have no more reason for wishing to shake hands with the man who thinks well of us, than for wishing to shake the man who thinks ill of us ; yet let us yield heartily to the former pleasant impulse. It is not reasonable, but it is all right. You cannot help liking people who estimate you favourably, and say a good word of you. No doubt we might slowly learn not to like them more than anybody else ; but we need not take the trouble to learn *that* lesson. Let us all, my readers, be glad if we can reach that cheerful position of mind at which various authors have arrived, that we shall be extremely gratified when we find ourselves favourably reviewed, and not in the least angry when we find ourselves reviewed unfavourably ; that we shall have a very kindly feeling towards such as think well of us, and no unkind feeling whatever to those who think ill of us. Thus, whenever we have written an article in a magazine, at the beginning of the month shall we look with equal minds at the newspaper notices of it ; we shall be soothed and exhilarated when we find ourselves described as sages, and we shall be amused and interested when we find ourselves shown up as little better than geese.

Of course, it makes a difference in the feeling with which you ought to regard any unfavourable

172 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

opinion of you, whether spoken or written, if the unfavourable opinion which is expressed be plainly not honestly held, and be maliciously expressed. You may occasionally hear a judgment expressed of a young girl's music or dancing, of a gentleman's horses, of a preacher's sermons, of an author's books, which is manifestly dictated by personal spite and jealousy, and which is expressed with the intention of doing mischief and giving pain to the person of whom the judgment is expressed. You will occasionally find such judgments supported by wilful misrepresentation, and even by pure invention. In such a case as this, the essential thing is not the unfavourable opinion ; it is the malice which leads to its entertainment and expression. And the conduct of the offending party should be regarded with that feeling which, on calm thought, you discern to be the right feeling with which to regard malice, accompanied by falsehood. Then is it well to be angry here ? I think not. You may see that it is not safe to have any communication with a person who will abuse and misrepresent you ; it is not safe, and it is not pleasant. But don't be angry. It is not worth while. That old lady, indeed, told all her friends that you said, in your book, something she knew quite well you did not say. Mr. Snarling did the like. But the offences of such people are not worth powder and shot ; and besides this, my friend, if you saw the case from their point of view,

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 173

you might see that they have something to say for themselves. You failed to call for the old lady so often as she wished you should. You did not ask Mr. Snarling to dinner. These are bad reasons for pitching into you ; but still they are reasons ; and Mr. Snarling and the old lady, by long brooding over them, may have come to think that they are very just and weighty reasons. And did you never, my friend, speak rather unkindly of these two persons ? Did you never give a ludicrous account of their goings-on, or even an ill-set account, which some kind friend was sure to repeat to them ? Ah, my reader ; don't be too hard on Snarling ; possibly you have yourself done something very like what he is doing now. Forgive, as you need to be forgiven ! And try to attain that quite attainable temper, in which you will read or listen to the most malignant attack upon you, with curiosity and amusement, and with no angry feeling at all. I suppose great people attain to this. I mean cabinet ministers and the like, who are daily flayed in print somewhere or other. They come to take it all quite easily. And if they were pure angels, somebody would attack them. Most people, even those who differ from him, know that if this world has a humble, conscientious, pious man in it, that man is the present Archbishop of Canterbury. Yet last night I read in a certain powerful journal, that the great characteristics of that good man, are cowardice, trickery, and simple

174 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

rascality ! Honest Mr. Bumpkin, kindhearted Miss Goodbody, do you fancy that *you* can escape ?

Then we ought to try to fix it in our mind, that in all matters into which taste enters at all, the most honest and the most able men may hopelessly, diametrically, differ. Original idiosyncrasy has so much to say here ; and training has also so much. One cultivated and honest man has an enthusiastic and most real love and enjoyment of Gothic architecture, and an absolute hatred for that of the classic revival ; another man equally cultivated and honest, has tastes which are the logical contradictory of these. No one can doubt the ability of Byron, or of Sheridan ; yet each of them thought very little of Shakspeare. The question is, *what suits you ?* You may have the strongest conviction that you ought to like an author : you may be ashamed to confess that you don't like him ; and yet you may feel that you detest him. For myself, I confess with shame, and I know the reason is in myself, I cannot for my life see anything to admire in the writings of Mr. Carlyle. His style, both of thought and language, is to me insufferably irritating. I tried to read the *Sartor Resartus*, and could not do it. So if all people who have learned to read English were like me, Mr. Carlyle would have no readers. Happily, the majority, in most cases, possesses the normal taste. At least there is no further appeal than to the deliberate judgment of the majority of educated men. I con-

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 175

fess, further, that I would rather read Mr. Helps than Milton: I do not say that I think Mr. Helps the greater man, but that I feel he suits me better. I value the *Autocrat of the Breakfast-table* more highly than all the writings of Shelley put together. It is a curious thing to read various reviews of the same book, particularly if it be one of those books which, if you like at all, you will like very much, and which, if you don't like, you will absolutely hate. It is curious to find opinions flatly contradictory of one another set forth in those reviews by very able, cultivated, and unprejudiced men. There is no newspaper published in Britain which contains abler writing than the *Edinburgh Scotsman*. And of course no one need say anything as to the literary merits of the *Times*. Well, one day within the last few months, the *Times* and the *Scotsman* each published a somewhat elaborate review of a certain book. The reviews were flatly opposed to one another; they had no common ground at all; one said the book was extremely good, and the other that it was extremely bad. You must just make up your mind that in matters of taste there can be no unvarying standard of truth. In æsthetic matters, truth is quite relative. What is bad to you, is good to me perhaps.

If you, my reader, are a wise and kind-hearted person (as I have no doubt whatever but you are), I think you would like very much to meet and converse with any person who has formed a bad

176 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

opinion of you. You would take great pleasure in overcoming such a one's prejudice against you ; and if the person were an honest and worthy person, you would be almost certain to do so. Very few folk are able to retain any bitter feeling towards a man they have actually talked with, unless the bitter feeling be one which is just. And a very great proportion of all the unfavourable opinions which men entertain of their fellow-men found on some misconception. You take up somehow an impression that such a one is a conceited, stuck-up person : you come to know him, and you find he is the frankest and most unaffected of men. You had a belief that such another was a cynical, heartless being, till you met him one day coming down a long black stair in a poor part of the town from a bare chamber in which is a little sick child, with two large tears running down his face ; and when you enter the poor apartment you learn certain facts as to his quiet benevolence which compel you suddenly to construct a new theory of that man's character. It is only people who are radically and essentially bad whom you can really dislike after you come to know them. And the human beings who are thus essentially bad are very few. Something of the original Image lingers yet in almost every human soul. And in many a homely, commonplace person, what with vestiges of the old, and a blessed planting-in of something new, there is a vast deal of it. And

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 177

every human being, conscious of honest intention and of a kind heart, may well wish that the man who dislikes and abuses him could just know him.

But there are human beings whom, if you are wise, you would not wish to know you too well. I mean the human beings (if such there should be) who think very highly of you ; who imagine you very clever and very amiable. Keep out of the way of such ! Let them see as little of you as possible. For when they come to know you well, they are quite sure to be disenchanted. The enthusiastic ideal which young people form of any one they admire is smashed by the rude presence of facts. I have got somewhat beyond the stage of feeling enthusiastic admiration, yet there are two or three living men whom I should be sorry to see. I know I should never admire them so much any more. I never saw Mr. Dickens : I don't want to see him. Let us leave Yarrow unvisited : our sweet ideal is fairer than the fairest fact. No hero is a hero to his valet : and it may be questioned whether any clergyman is a saint to his beadle. Yet the hero may be a true hero, and the clergyman a very excellent man : but no human being can bear too close inspection. I remember hearing a clever and enthusiastic young lady complain of what she had suffered on meeting a certain great bishop at dinner. No doubt he was dignified, pleasant, clever ; but the mysterious halo was no longer round his head.

178 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

Here is a sad circumstance in the lot of a very eminent man: I mean such a man as Mr. Tennyson or Professor Longfellow. As an elephant walks through a field, crushing the crop at every step, so do these men advance through life, smashing, every time they dine out, the enthusiastic fancies of several romantic young people.

This was to have been a short essay. But you see it is already long; and I have treated only two of the four Things Slowly Learnt which I had noted down. The other two must be very briefly stated.

The first of the two things is a practical lesson. It is this: to allow for human folly, laziness, carelessness, and the like, just as you allow for the properties of matter, such as weight, friction, and the like, without being surprised or angry at them. You know that if a man is lifting a piece of lead he does not think of getting into a rage because it is heavy; or if a man is dragging a tree along the ground he does not get into a rage because it ploughs deeply into the earth as it comes. He is not surprised at these things. They are nothing new. It is just what he counted on. But you will find that the same man, if his servants are lazy, careless, and forgetful; or if his friends are petted, wrong-headed, and impracticable; will not only get quite angry, but will get freshly angry at each new action which proves that his friends or servants possess these

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 179

characteristics. Would it not be better to make up your mind that such things are characteristic of humanity, and so that you must look for them in dealing with human beings? And would it not be better, too, to regard each new proof of laziness, not as a new thing to be angry with, but merely as a piece of the one great fact that your servant is lazy, with which you get angry once for all, and have done with it? If your servant makes twenty blunders a day, do not regard them as twenty separate facts at which to get angry twenty several times. Regard them just as twenty proofs of the one fact, that your servant is a blunderer; and be angry just once, and no more. Or if some one you know gives twenty indications in a day that he or she (let us say she) is of a petted temper, regard these merely as twenty proofs of one lamentable fact, and not as twenty different facts to be separately lamented. You accept the fact that the person is petted and ill-tempered: you regret it and blame it once for all. And after this once you take as of course all new manifestations of pettedness and ill-temper. And you are no more surprised at them, or angry with them, than you are at lead for being heavy, or at down for being light. It is their nature, and you calculate on it, and allow for it.

Then the second of the two remaining things is this—that you have no right to complain if you are

180 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

postponed to greater people, or if you are treated with less consideration than you would be if you were a greater person. Uneducated people are very slow to learn this most obvious lesson. I remember hearing of a proud old lady, who was proprietor of a small landed estate in Scotland. She had many relations, some greater, some less. The greater she much affected, the less she wholly ignored. But they did not ignore *her*; and one morning an individual arrived at her mansion-house, bearing a large box on his back. He was a travelling pedlar; and he sent up word to the old lady that he was her cousin, and hoped she would buy something from him. The old lady indignantly refused to see him, and sent orders that he should forthwith quit the house. The pedlar went; but on reaching the courtyard, he turned to the inhospitable dwelling, and in a loud voice exclaimed, in the ears of every mortal in the house, ‘Aye, if I had come in my carriage-and-four, ye wad have been proud to have ta’en me in!’ The pedlar fancied that he was hurling at his relative a scathing sarcasm: he did not see that he was simply stating a perfectly unquestionable fact. No doubt earthly, if he had come in a carriage-and-four, he would have got a hearty welcome, and he would have found his claim of kindred eagerly allowed. But he thought he was saying a bitter and cutting thing and (strange to say) the old lady fancied she was listening to a bitter and cutting

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 181

thing. He was merely expressing a certain and innocuous truth. But though all mortals know that in this world big people meet greater respect than small (and quite right too), most mortals seem to find the principle a very unpleasant one when it comes home to themselves. And we learn but slowly to acquiesce in seeing ourselves plainly subordinated to other people. Poor Oliver Goldsmith was very angry when at the club one night he was stopped in the middle of a story by a Dutchman, who had noticed that the Great Bear was rolling about in preparation for speaking, and who exclaimed to Goldsmith, 'Stop, stop; Tdoctor Shonson is going to speak!' Once I arrived at a certain railway station. Two old ladies were waiting to go by the same train. I knew them well, and they expressed their delight that we were going the same way. 'Let us go in the same carriage,' said the younger, in earnest tones; 'and will you be so very kind as to see about our luggage?' After a few minutes of the lively talk of the period and district, the train came up. I feel the tremor of the platform yet. I handed my friends into a carriage, and then saw their baggage placed in the van. It was a station at which trains stop for a few minutes for refreshments. So I went to the door of the carriage into which I had put them, and waited a little before taking my seat. I expected that my friends would proceed with the conversation which had been

4

182 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

interrupted ; but to my astonishment I found that I had become wholly invisible to them. They did not see me or speak to me at all. In the carriage with them was a living peer, of wide estates and great rank, whom they knew. And so thoroughly did he engross their eyes and thoughts and words, that they had become unaware of my presence, or even my existence. The stronger sensation rendered them unconscious of the weaker. Do you think I felt angry? No, I did not. I felt very much amused. I recognised a slight manifestation of a grand principle. It was a straw showing how a current sets, but for which Britain would not be the country it is. I took my seat in another carriage, and placidly read my *Times*. There was one lady in that carriage. I think she inferred, from the smiles which occasionally for the first few miles overspread my countenance without apparent cause, that my mind was slightly disordered.

These are the two things already mentioned. But you cannot understand, friendly reader, what an effort it has cost me to treat them so briefly. The experienced critic will discern at a glance that the author could easily have made a great many pages out of the material you have here in very few. The author takes his stand upon this—that there are few people who can beat out thought so thin, or say so little in such a great number of words. I

Concerning Things Slowly Learnt. 183

remember how a dear friend, once the editor of a certain well-known magazine (whom all who knew him well miss more and more as days and weeks go on, and never will cease to miss), used to remark this fact in various warm-hearted and playful letters, with wonder not unmixed with indignation. And I remember how a very great prelate (who could compress all I have said into a page and a half) once comforted me by telling me that for the consumption of many minds it was desirable that thought should be very greatly diluted; that quantity as well as quality is needful in the dietetics both of the body and the mind. With this soothing reflection I close the present essay.

Annotations on the foregoing Chapter.

BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN.

(1.) The Indian Brahmin who purchased, for a great price, an elaborate microscope which had shown him that he swallowed multitudes of minute animalculæ in every draught of water, dashed it to pieces, saying it should never inflict that misery upon others it had upon him.

(2.) E. S. (now Lord St. L.), is the son of a hairdresser, said to have been very eminent in his own way. A gentleman asked the man who was cutting his hair whether he remembered anything of

184 *Concerning Things Slowly Learnt.*

him. 'Oh, yes; I remember him very well when I was an apprentice. Wonderful man! Had half-a-guinea for cutting hair! Nobody like him since!' 'Well,' said the other, 'his *son* is a very eminent man too in *his* way.' 'Oh, is he, sir?' 'Yes; the first lawyer in England.' 'Oh, is he, sir—I *never* heard of him.'

(3.) A gentleman who was fond of attending at the Lord Mayor of London's, to hear the trials and petitions and memorials that were going on, heard a memorial sent in by some Chimney Sweepers, who complained of an interference which encroached on their annual May-Day festival, on which they dress themselves up and go round to receive contributions from their customers. They complained that their place had been usurped by certain *Dustmen* and other *low fellows pretending to be Chimney Sweepers!*

CHAPTER VI.

CONCERNING VEAL ;

A DISCOURSE OF IMMATURITY.

THE man who, in his progress through life, has listened with attention to the conversation of human beings ; who has carefully read the writings of the best English authors ; who has made himself well acquainted with the history and usages of his native land ; and who has meditated much on all he has seen and read ; must have been led to the firm conviction that by VEAL, those who speak the English language intend to denote the flesh of calves ; and that by a calf is intended an immature ox or cow. A calf is a creature in a temporary and progressive stage of its being. It will not always be a calf ; if it live long enough, it will assuredly cease to be a calf. And if impatient man, arresting the creature at that stage, should consign it to the hands of him whose business it is to convert the sentient animal into the impassive and

unconscious meat, the nutriment which the creature will afford will be nothing more than immature beef. There may be many qualities of Veal ; the calf which yields it may die at very different stages in its physical and moral development ; but provided only it die as a calf—provided only that its meat can fitly be styled Veal—*this* will be characteristic of it, that the meat shall be immature meat. It may be very good, very nutritious and palatable ; some people may like it better than beef, and may feed upon it with the liveliest satisfaction ; but when it is fairly and deliberately put to us, it must be admitted even by such as like Veal the best, that Veal is but an immature production of nature. I take Veal, therefore, as the emblem of IMMATURITY ; of that which is now in a stage out of which it must grow ; of that which, as time goes on, will grow older, will probably grow better, will certainly grow very different. *That* is what I mean by Veal.

And now, my reader and friend, you will discern the subject about which I trust we are to have some pleasant and not unprofitable thought together. You will readily believe that my subject is not that material Veal which may be beheld and purchased in the butchers' shops. I am not now to treat of its varied qualities, of the sustenance which it yields, of the price at which it may be procured, or of the laws according to which that price rises and falls. I am not going to take you to the green fields in

which the creature which yielded the Veal was fed, or to discourse of the blossoming hawthorn hedges from whose midst it was reft away. Neither shall I speak of the rustic life, the toils, cares, and fancies of the farm-house near which it spent its brief lifetime. The Veal of which I intend to speak is Moral Veal, or (to speak with entire accuracy); Veal Intellectual, Moral, and Æsthetical. By Veal I understand the immature productions of the human mind; immature compositions, immature opinions, feelings, and tastes. I wish to think of the work, the views, the fancies, the emotions, which are yielded by the human soul in its immature stages; while the calf (so to speak) is only growing into the ox; while the clever boy, with his absurd opinions and feverish feelings and fancies, is developing into the mature and sober-minded man. And if I could but rightly set out the thoughts which have at many different times occurred to me on this matter, if one could catch and fix the vague glimpses and passing intuitions of solid unchanging truth, if the subject on which one has thought long and felt deeply were always that on which one could write best, and could bring out to the sympathy of others what a man himself has felt, what an excellent essay this would be! But it will not be so; for as I try to grasp the thoughts I would set out, they melt away and elude me. It is like trying to catch and keep the rainbow hues you have seen the sunshine

cast upon the spray of a waterfall, when you try to catch the tone, the thoughts, the feelings, the atmosphere of early youth.

There can be no question at all as to the fact, that clever young men and women, when their minds begin to open, when they begin to think for themselves, do pass through a stage of mental development which they by and bye quite outgrow; and entertain opinions and beliefs, and feel emotions, on which afterwards they look back with no sympathy or approval. This is a fact as certain as that a calf grows into an ox, or that veal, if spared to grow, will become beef. But no analogy between the material and the moral must be pushed too far. There are points of difference between material and moral Veal. A calf knows it is a calf. It may think itself bigger and wiser than an ox, but it knows it is not an ox. And if it be a reasonable calf, modest, and free from prejudice, it is well aware that the joints it will yield after its demise, will be very different from those of the stately and well-consolidated ox which ruminates in the rich pasture near it. But the human boy often thinks he is a man, and even more than a man. He fancies that his mental stature is as big and as solid as it will ever become. He fancies that his mental productions—the poems and essays he writes, the political and social views he forms the moods of feeling with

which he regards things—are just what they may always be, just what they ought always to be. If spared in this world, and if he be one of those whom years make wiser, the day comes when he looks back with amazement and shame on those early mental productions. He discerns now how immature, absurd, and extravagant they were ; in brief, how vealy. But at the time, he had not the least idea that they were so. He had entire confidence in himself ; not a misgiving as to his own ability and wisdom. You, clever young student of eighteen years old, when you wrote your prize essay, fancied that in thought and style it was very like Macaulay ; and not Macaulay in that stage of vealy brilliancy in which he wrote his essay on *Milton*, not Macaulay the fairest and most promising of calves, but Macaulay the stateliest and most beautiful of oxen. Well, read over your essay now at thirty, and tell us what you think of it. And you, clever, warm-hearted, enthusiastic young preacher of twenty-four, wrote your sermon ; it was very ingenious, very brilliant in style, and you never thought but that it would be felt by mature-minded Christian people as suiting their case, as true to their inmost experience. You could not see why you might not preach as well as a man of forty. And if people in middle age had complained that, eloquent as your preaching was, they found it suited them better and profited them more to listen to the plainer instructions of

some good man with gray hair, you would not have understood their feeling; and you might perhaps have attributed it to many motives rather than the true one. But now, at five-and-thirty, find out the yellow manuscript, and read it carefully over; and I will venture to say, that if you were a really clever and eloquent young man, writing in an ambitious and rhetorical style, and prompted to do so by the spontaneous fervour of your heart and readiness of your imagination, you will feel now little sympathy even with the literary style of that early composition; you will see extravagance and bombast where once you saw only eloquence and graphic power. And as for the graver and more important matter of the thought of the discourse, I think you will be aware of a certain undefinable shallowness and crudity. Your growing experience has borne you beyond it. Somehow you feel it does not come home to you, and suit you as you would wish it should. It will not do. That old sermon you cannot preach now, till you have entirely re-cast and re-written it. But you had no such notion when you wrote the sermon. You were satisfied with it. You thought it even better than the discourses of men as clever as yourself, and ten or fifteen years older. Your case was as though the youthful calf should walk beside the sturdy ox, and think itself rather bigger.

Let no clever young reader fancy from what has been said, that I am about to make an onslaught

upon clever young men. I remember too distinctly how bitter and indeed ferocious I used to feel, about eleven or twelve years ago, when I have heard men of more than middle age and less than middling ability speak with contemptuous depreciation of the productions and doings of men considerably their juniors, and vastly their superiors ; describing them as *boys*, and as *clever lads*, with looks of dark malignity. There are few more disgusting sights, than the envy and jealousy of their juniors, which may be seen in various malicious, commonplace old men ; as there is hardly a more beautiful and pleasing sight than the old man hailing, and counselling, and encouraging the youthful genius which he knows far surpasses his own. And I, my young friend of two-and-twenty, who relatively to you, may be regarded as old, am going to assume no preposterous airs of superiority. I do not claim to be a bit wiser than you ; all I claim is to be older. I have outgrown your stage ; but I was once such as you, and all my sympathies are with you yet. But it is a difficulty in the way of the essayist, and, indeed, of all who set out opinions which they wish to be received and acted on by their fellow-creatures, that they seem, by the very act of offering advice to others, to claim to be wiser and better than those whom they advise. But in reality it is not so. The opinions of the essayist or of the preacher, if deserving of notice at all, are so because of their inherent truth, and not

because he expresses them. Estimate them for yourself, and give them the weight which you think their due. And be sure of this, that the writer, if earnest and sincere, addressed all he said to himself as much as to any one else. This is the thing which redeems all didactic writing or speaking from the charge of offensive assumption and self-assertion. It is not for the preacher, whether of moral or religious truth, to address his fellows as outside sinners, worse than himself, and needing to be reminded of that of which he does not need to be reminded. No, the earnest preacher preaches to himself as much as to any in the congregation; it is from the picture ever before him in his own weak and wayward heart, that he learns to reach and describe the hearts of others, if indeed he do so at all. And it is the same with lesser things.

It is curious and it is instructive to remark how heartily men, as they grow towards middle age, despise themselves as they were a few years since. It is a bitter thing for a man to confess that he *is* a fool; but it costs little effort to declare that he *was* a fool, a good while ago. Indeed, a tacit compliment to his present self is involved in the latter confession; it suggests the reflection what progress he has made, and how vastly he has improved, since then. When a man informs us that he was a very silly fellow in the year 1851, it is assumed that he

is not a very silly fellow in the year 1861. It is as when the merchant with ten thousand a year, sitting at his sumptuous table, and sipping his '41 claret, tells you how, when he came as a raw lad from the country, he used often to have to go without his dinner. He knows that the plate, the wine, the massively elegant apartment, the silent servants so alert yet so impassive, will appear to join in chorus with the obvious suggestion, 'You see he has not to go without his dinner now!' Did you ever, when twenty years old, look back at the diary you kept when you were sixteen; or when twenty-five at the diary you kept when twenty; or at thirty, at the diary you kept when twenty-five? Was not your feeling a singular mixture of humiliation and self-complacency? What extravagant, silly stuff it seemed that you had thus written five years before! What Veal; and oh what a calf he must have been who wrote it! It is a difficult question, to which the answer cannot be elicited, Who is the greatest fool in this world? But every candid and sensible man of middle age, knows thoroughly well the answer to the question, Who was the greatest fool that he himself ever knew? And after all, it is your diary, especially if you were wont to introduce into it poetical remarks and moral reflections, that will mainly help you to the humiliating conclusion. Other things, some of which I have already named, will point in the same direction. Look at the prize

essays you wrote when you were a boy at school ; look even at your earlier prize essays written at college (though of these last I have something to say hereafter) ; look at the letters you wrote home when away at school or even at college, especially if you were a clever boy, trying to write in a graphic and witty fashion ; and if you have reached sense at last (which some, it may be remarked, never do), I think you will blush even through the unblushing front of manhood, and think what a terrific, unutterable, conceited, intolerable blockhead you were. It is not till people attain somewhat mature years that they can rightly understand the wonderful forbearance their parents must have shown in listening patiently to the frightful nonsense they talked and wrote. I have already spoken of sermons. If you go early into the Church, say at twenty-three or twenty-four, and write sermons regularly and diligently, you know what landmarks they will be of your mental progress. The first runnings of the stream are turbid, but it clears itself into sense and taste month by month and year by year. You wrote many sermons in your first year or two ; you preached them with entire confidence in them, and they did really keep up the attention of the congregation in a remarkable way. You accumulate in a box a store of that valuable literature and theology, and when by and bye you go to another parish, you have a comfortable feeling that you have a capital

stock to go on with. You think that any Monday morning when you have the prospect of a very busy week, or when you feel very weary, you may resolve that you shall write no sermon that week, but just go and draw forth one from the box. I have already said what you will probably find, even if you draw forth a discourse which cost much labour. You cannot use it as it stands. Possibly it may be structural and essential Veal: the whole framework of thought may be immature. Possibly it may be Veal only in style; and by cutting out a turgid sentence here and there, and above all, by cutting out all the passages which you thought particularly eloquent, the discourse may do yet. But even then, you cannot give it with much confidence. Your mind can yield something better than that now. I imagine how a fine old orange tree, that bears oranges with the thinnest possible skin and with no pips, juicy and rich, might feel that it has outgrown the fruit of its first years, when the skin was half an inch thick, the pips innumerable, and the eatable portion small and poor. It is with a feeling such as *that* that you read over your early sermon. Still, mingling with the sense of shame, there is a certain satisfaction. You have not been standing still; you have been getting on. And we always like to think *that*.

What is it that makes intellectual Veal? What

are the things about a composition which stamp it as such ? Well, it is a certain character in thought and style hard to define, but strongly felt by such as discern its presence at all. It is strongly felt by professors reading the compositions of their students, especially the compositions of the cleverest students. It is strongly felt by educated folk of middle age, in listening to the sermons of young pulpit orators, especially of such as think for themselves, of such as aim at a high standard of excellence, of such as have in them the makings of striking and eloquent preachers. Dull and stupid fellows never deviate into the extravagance and absurdity which I specially understand by Veal. They plod along in a humdrum manner : there is no poetry in their soul ; none of those ambitious stirrings which lead the man who has in him the true spark of genius to try for grand things and incur severe and ignominious tumbles. A heavy dray-horse, walking along the road, may possibly advance at a very lagging pace, or may even stand still ; but whatever he may do, he is not likely to jump violently over the hedge, or to gallop off at twenty-five miles an hour. It must be a thoroughbred who will go wrong in that grand fashion. And there are intellectual absurdities and extravagances which hold out hopeful promise of noble doings yet ; the eagle, which will breast the hurricane yet, may meet various awkward tumbles before he learns the fashion in which to use those iron wings. But the

substantial goose, which probably escapes those tumbles in trying to fly, will never do anything very magnificent in the way of flying. The man who in his early days writes in a very inflated and bombastic style, will gradually sober down into good sense and accurate taste, still retaining something of liveliness and eloquence. But expect little of the man who as a boy was always sensible, and never bombastic. *He* will grow awfully dry. *He* is sure to fall into the unpardonable sin of tiresomeness. The rule has exceptions ; but the earliest productions of a man of real genius are almost alway crude, flippant, and affectedly smart ; or else turgid and extravagant in a high degree. Witness Mr. Disraeli ; witness Sir E. B. Lytton ; witness even Macaulay. The man who as a mere boy writes something very sound and sensible, will probably never become more than a dull, sensible, commonplace man. Many people can say, as they bethink themselves of their old college companions, that those who wrote with good sense and good taste at twenty, have mostly settled down into the dullest and baldest of proser ; while such as dealt in bombastic flourishes and absurd ambitiousness of style, have learned as time went on to prune their early luxuriances, while still retaining something of raciness, interest, and ornament.

I have been speaking very generally of the characteristics of Veal in composition. It is difficult

to give any accurate description of it that shall go into minuter details. Of course it is easy to think of little external marks of the beast—that is, the calf. It is *Veal* in style when people, writing prose, think it a fine thing to write *o'er* instead of *over*, *ne'er* instead of *never*, *poesie* instead of *poetry*, and *methinks* under any circumstances whatsoever. References to the heart are generally of the nature of *Veal*, also allusions to the mysterious throbbings and yearnings of our nature. The word *grand* has of late come to excite a strong suspicion of *Veal*; and when I read the other day in a certain poem something about a *great grand man*, I concluded that the writer of that poem is meanwhile a great grand calf. The only case in which the words may properly be used together is in speaking of your great grandfather. To talk about *mine* affections, meaning *my* affections, is *Veal*; and *mine bonnie love* was decided *Veal*, though it was written by Charlotte Brontë. To say *mayhap*, when you mean *perhaps*, is *Veal*. So is it also to talk of human knowledge when you mean human *knowledge*. To speak of something higher and holier is invariably *Veal*; and it is usually *Veal* to speak of something *mine*. *Wife mine* is *Veal* though it stands in *Shakespeare*. I should like to see the man who says *oh never*, shall write to address his spouse *oh never*, shall write *Sylvan*

is Veal. The word *glorious* should be used with caution; when applied to trees, mountains, or the like, there is a strong suspicion of Veal about it. But one feels that in saying these things we are not getting at the essence of Veal. It is Veal in thought that is essential Veal, and *that* is very hard to define. Beyond extravagant language, beyond absurd fine things, it lies in a certain lack of reality and sobriety of sense and view—in a certain indefinable jejuneness in the mental fare provided, which makes mature men feel that somehow it does not satisfy their cravings. You know what I mean better than I can express it. You have seen and heard a young preacher, with a rosy face and an unlined brow, preaching about the cares and trials of life. Well, you just feel at once he knows nothing about them. You feel that all this is at

second-hand. He is saying all this because he supposes it is the right thing to say. Give me the pilot to direct me who has sailed through the difficult channel many times himself! Give me the friend to sympathize with me in sorrow, who has felt the like. There is a hollowness, a certain want, in the talk about the tribulation of the very bravest man who has never felt any great sorrow at all. The greatest value of all teaching lie in the experience which is embodied in the life of the teacher. There is a difference between the production of a work by a boy and of a mature

man when you read the first canto of *Childe Harold* and then read *Philip van Artevelde*. I do not say but that the boy's production may have a liveliness and interest beyond the man's. Veal is in certain respects superior to beef, though beef is best on the whole. I have heard vealy preachers whose sermons kept up breathless attention. From the first word to the last of a sermon which was unquestionable Veal, I have witnessed an entire congregation listen with that audible hush you know. It was very different indeed from the state of matters when a humdrum old gentleman was preaching, every word spoken by whom was the maturest sense, expressed in words to which the most fastidious taste could have taken no exception ; but then the whole thing was sleepy ; it was a terrible effort to attend. In the case of the Veal there was no effort at all. I defy you to help attending. But then you sat in pain. Every second sentence there was some outrageous offence against good taste ; every third statement was absurd or overdrawn or almost profane. You felt occasional thrills of pure disgust and horror, and you were in terror what might come next. One thing which tended to carry all this off was the manifest confidence and earnestness of the speaker. *He* did not think it Veal that he was saying. And though great consternation was depicted on the faces of some of the better educated people in church, you could see that a very con-

siderable part of the congregation did not think it Veal either. There can be no doubt, my middle-aged friend, if you could but give your early sermons now with the confidence and fire of the time when you wrote them, they would make a deep impression on many people yet. But it is simply impossible for you to give them; and if you should force yourself some rainy Sunday to preach one of them, you would give it with such a sense of its errors and with such an absence of corresponding feeling that it would fall very flat and dead. Your views are maturing: your taste is growing fastidious; the strong things you once said you could not bring yourself to say now. If you *could* preach those old sermons there is no doubt they would go down with the mass of uncultivated folk—go down better than your mature and reasonable ones. We have all known such cases as that of a young preacher who, at twenty-five, in his days of Veal, drew great crowds to the church at which he preached; and who at thirty-five, being a good deal tamed and sobered, and in the judgment of competent judges vastly improved, attracted no more than a respectable congregation. A very great and eloquent preacher lately lamented to me the uselessness of his store of early discourses. If he could but get rid of his present standard of what is right and good in thought and language, and preach them with the enchaining fire with which he preached them once!

For many hearers remain immature, though the preacher has matured. Young people are growing up, and there are people whose taste never ripens beyond the enjoyment of Veal. There is a period in the mental development of those who will be ablest and maturest, at which vealy thought and language are accepted as the best. Veal will be highly appreciated by sympathetic calves; and the greatest men, with rare exceptions, are calves in youth, while many human beings are calves for ever. And here I may remark, as something which has afforded me consolation on various occasions within the last year, that it seems unquestionable that sermons which are utterly revolting to people of taste and sense, have done much good to large masses of those people in whom common sense is most imperfectly developed, and in whom taste is not developed at all; and accordingly, wherever one is convinced of the sincerity of the individuals, however foolish and uneducated, who go about pouring forth those violent, exaggerated, and all but blasphemous discourses of which I have read accounts in the newspapers, one would humbly hope that a Power which works by many means, would bring about good even through an instrumentality which it is hard to contemplate without some measure of horror. The impression produced by most things in this world is relative to the minds on which the impression is produced. A coarse ballad, deficient in

rhyme and rhythm, and only half decent, will keep up the attention of a rustic group to whom you might read from *In Memoriam* in vain. A waistcoat of glaring scarlet will be esteemed by a country bumpkin a garment every way preferable to one of aspect more subdued. A nigger melody will charm many a one who would yawn at Beethoven. You must have rough means to move rough people. The outrageous revival-orator may do good to people to whom Bishop Wilberforce or Dr. Caird might preach to no purpose ; and if real good be done, by whatever means, all right-minded people should rejoice to hear of it.

And this leads to an important practical question, on which men at different periods of life will never agree. *When* shall thought be regarded as mature ? Is there a standard by which we can ascertain beyond question whether a composition be Veal or Beef ? I sigh for fixity and assurance in matters æsthetical. It is vexatious that what I think very good my friend Smith thinks very bad. It is vexatious that what strikes me as supreme and unapproachable excellence, strikes another person at least as competent to form an opinion, as poor. And I am angry with myself when I feel that I honestly regard as inflated common-place and mystical jargon, what a man as old and (let us say) nearly as wise as myself thinks the utterance of a prophet. You know how, when you contemplate the purchase of a horse, you lead him

up to the measuring-bar, and there ascertain the precise number of hands and inches which he stands. How have I longed for the means of subjecting the mental stature of human beings to an analogous process of measurement! Oh for some recognised and unerring gauge of mental calibre! It would be a grand thing if somewhere in a very conspicuous position—say on the site of the National Gallery at Charing-cross—there were a pillar erected, graduated by some new Fahrenheit, on which we could measure the height of a man's mind. How delightful it would be to drag up some pompous pretender who passes off at once upon himself and others as a profound and able man, and make him measure his height upon that pillar, and understand beyond all cavil what a pigmy he is! And how pleasant, too, it would be to bring up some man of unacknowledged genius, and make the world see the reach of *his* intellectual stature! The mass of educated people even are so incapable of forming an estimate of a man's ability, that it would be a blessing if men could be sent out into the world with the stamp upon them, telling what are their weight and value, plain for every one to see. But of course there are many ways in which a book, sermon, or essay, may be bad without being Vealy. It may be dull, stupid, illogical, and the like, and yet have nothing of boyishness about it. It may be insufferably bad, yet quite mature. Beef may be bad, and yet un-

doubtedly beef. And the question now is, not so much whether there be a standard of what is in a literary sense good or bad, as whether there be a standard of what is Veal and what is Beef. And there is a great difficulty here. Is a thing to be regarded as mature when it suits your present taste ; when it is approved by your present deliberate judgment ? For your taste is always changing : your standard is not the same for three successive years of your early youth. The Veal you now despise you thought Beef when you wrote it. And so, too, with the productions of other men. You cannot read now without amazement the books which used to enchant you as a child. I remember when I used to read Hervey's *Meditations* with great delight. That was when I was about five years old. A year or two later I greatly affected Macpherson's translation of Ossian. It is not so very long since I felt the liveliest interest in Tupper's *Proverbial Philosophy*. Let me confess that I retain a kindly feeling towards it yet ; and that I am glad to see that some hundreds of thousands of readers appear to be still in the stage out of which I passed some years since. Yes, as you grow older your taste changes : it becomes more fastidious ; and especially you come to have always less toleration for sentimental feeling and for flights of fancy. And besides this gradual and constant progression, which holds on uniformly year after year, there are changes in mood and taste sometimes from

day to day and from hour to hour. The man who did a very silly thing thought it was a wise thing when he did it. He sees the matter differently in a little while. On the evening after the battle of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington wrote a certain letter. History does not record its matter or style. But history does record that some years afterwards the Duke paid a hundred guineas to get it back again ; and that on getting it he instantly burnt it, exclaiming that when he wrote it he must have been the greatest idiot on the face of the earth. Doubtless, if we had seen that letter, we should have heartily coincided in the sentiment of the hero. He *was* an idiot when he wrote it, but he did not think that he was one. I think, however, that there is a standard of sense and folly ; and that there is a point at which Veal is Veal no more. But I do not believe that thought can justly be called mature only when it has become such as to suit the taste of some desperately dry old gentleman with as much feeling as a log of wood, and as much imagination as an oyster. I know how intolerant some dull old fogies are of youthful fire and fancy. I shall not be convinced that any discourse is puerile because it is pronounced such by the venerable Dr. Dryasdust. I remember that the venerable man has written many pages, possibly abundant in sound sense, but which no mortal could read, and to which no mortal could listen. I remember that though that not very amiable indi-

vidual has outlived such wits as he once had, he has not outlived the unbecoming emotions of envy and jealousy ; and he retains a strong tendency to evil-speaking and slandering. You told me, unamiable individual, how disgusted you were at hearing a friend of mine who is one of the best preachers in Britain, preach one of his finest sermons. Perhaps you really were disgusted : there is such a thing as casting pearls before swine, who will not appreciate them highly. But you went on to give an account of what the great preacher said ; and though I know you are extremely stupid, you are not quite so stupid as to have actually fancied that the great preacher said what you reported that he said : you were well aware that you were grossly misrepresenting him. And when I find malice and insincerity in one respect I am ready to suspect them in another : and I venture to doubt whether you were disgusted. Possibly, you were only ferocious at finding yourself so unspeakably excelled. But even if you had been really disgusted ; and even if you were a clever man ; and even if you were above the suspicion of jealousy ; I should not think that my friend's noble discourse was puerile because you thought it so. It is not when the warm feelings of earlier days are dried up into a cold, time-worn cynicism, that I think a man has become the best judge of the products of the human brain and heart. It is a noble thing when a man grows old, retaining something of youthful freshness

and fervour. It is a fine thing to ripen without shrivelling : to reach the calmness of age, yet keep the warm heart and ready sympathy of youth. Show me such a man as *that*, and I shall be content to bow to *his* decision whether a thing be Veal or not. But as such men are not found very frequently, I should suggest it as an approximation to a safe criterion; that a thing may be regarded as mature when it is deliberately and dispassionately approved by an educated man of good ability, and above thirty years of age. No doubt a man of fifty may hold that fifty is the age of sound taste and sense : and a youth of twenty-three may maintain that he is as good a judge of human doings now as he will ever be. I do not claim to have proposed an infallible standard. I give you my present belief, being well aware that it is very likely to alter.

It is not desirable that one's taste should become too fastidious, or that natural feeling should be refined away. And a cynical young man is bad, but a cynical old one is a great deal worse. The cynical young man is probably shamming ; he is a humbug, not a cynic. But the old man probably *is* a cynic, as heartless as he seems. And without thinking of cynicism, real or affected, let us remember that though the taste ought to be refined and daily refining, it ought not to be refined beyond being practically serviceable. Let things be good ; but not too good to be workable. It is expedient that a

cart for conveying coals should be of neat and decent appearance. Let the shafts be symmetrical, the boards well-planed, the whole strong yet not clumsy ; and over the whole let the painter's skill induce a hue rosy as beauty's cheek, or dark-blue as her eye. All *that* is well ; and while the cart will carry its coals satisfactorily, it will stand a good deal of rough usage, and it will please the eye of the rustic who sits in it on an empty sack, and whistles as it moves along. But it would be highly inexpedient to make that cart of walnut of the finest grain and marking, and to have it French-polished. It would be too fine to be of use ; and its possessor would fear to scratch it ; and would preserve it as a show, seeking some plainer vehicle to carry his coals. In like manner, do not refine too much either the products of the mind, or the sensibilities of the taste which is to appreciate them. I know an amiable professor very different from Dr. Dryasdust. He was a country clergyman ; a very interesting plain preacher. But when he got his chair, he had to preach a good deal in the college chapel ; and by way of accommodating his discourses to an academic audience, he re-wrote them carefully ; rubbed off all the salient points ; cooled down whatever warmth was in them to frigid accuracy ; toned down everything striking. The result was that his sermons became eminently classical and elegant ; only they became impossible to attend to, and impossible to

remember. And when you heard the good man preach, you sighed for the rough and striking heartiness of former days. And we have all heard of such a thing as taste refined to that painful sensitiveness, that it became a source of torment ; that is, unfitted for common enjoyments and even for common duties. There was once a great man, let us say at Melipotamus, who never went to church. A clergyman once in speaking to a friend of the great man, lamented that the great man set so bad an example before his humbler neighbours. ‘How *can* that man go to church,’ was the reply ; ‘his taste, and his entire critical faculty is sharpened to that degree, that in listening to any ordinary preacher, he feels outraged and shocked at every fourth sentence he hears, by its inelegance or its want of logic ; and the entire sermon torments him by its unsymmetrical structure, its want of perspective in the presentment of details, and its general literary badness.’ I quite believe that there was a moderate proportion of truth in the excuse thus urged ; and you will probably judge that it would have been better had the great man’s mind not been brought to so painful a polish.

The mention of dried-up old gentlemen reminds one of a question which has sometimes perplexed me. Is it Vealy to feel or to show keen emotion ? Is it a precious result and indication of the maturity of the human mind, to look as if you felt nothing at

all? I have often looked with wonder, and with a moderate amount of veneration, at a few old gentlemen whom I know well, who are leading members of a certain legislative and judicial council, held in great respect in a country of which no more need be said. I have beheld these old gentlemen sitting apparently quite unmoved when discussions were going on in which I knew they felt a very deep interest, and when the tide of debate was setting strongly against their peculiar views. There they sat, impassive as a Red Indian at the stake. I think of a certain man who, while a smart speech on the other side is being made, retains a countenance expressing actually nothing; he looks as if he heard nothing, felt nothing, cared for nothing. But when the other man sits down, he rises to reply. He speaks slowly at first, but every weighty word goes home and tells: he gathers warmth and rapidity as he goes on, and in a little you become aware that for a few hundred pounds a year, you may sometimes get a man who would have made an Attorney-General or a Lord Chancellor; you discern that under the appearance of almost stolidity, there was the sharpest attention watching every word of the argument of the other speaker, and ready to come down on every weak point in it; and the other speaker is (in a logical sense) pounded to jelly by a succession of straight-handed hits. Yes, it is a wonderful thing to find a combination of coolness

and earnestness. But I am inclined to believe that the reason why some old gentlemen look as if they did not care, is that in fact they don't care. And there is no particular merit in looking cool while a question is being discussed, if you really do not mind a rush which way it may be decided. A keen, unvarying, engrossing regard for one's self, is a great safeguard against over-excitement in regard to all the questions of the day, political, social, and religious.

It is a curious but certain fact, that clever young men, at that period of their life when their own likings tend towards Veal, know quite well the difference between veal and beef; and are quite able, when necessary, to produce the latter. The tendency to boyishness of thought and style may be repressed when you know you are writing for the perusal of readers with whom *that* will not go down. A student of twenty, who has in him great talent, no matter how undue a supremacy his imagination may meanwhile have, if he be set to producing an essay in Metaphysics to be read by professors of philosophy, will produce a composition singularly free from any trace of immaturity. For such a clever youth, though he may have a strong bent towards Veal, has in him an instinctive perception that it *is* Veal; and a keen sense of what will and will not do for the particular readers he has to

please. Go, you essayist who carried off a host of university honours ; and read over now the prize essays you wrote at twenty-one or twenty-two. I think the thing that will mainly strike you will be, how very mature these compositions are ; how ingenious, how judicious, how free from extravagance, how quietly and accurately and even felicitously expressed. *They* are not Veal. And yet you know, that several years after you wrote them you were still writing a great deal which was Veal beyond all question. But then a clever youth can produce material to any given standard ; and you wrote the essays not to suit your own taste, but to suit what you intuitively knew was the taste of the grave and even smoke-dried professors who were to read them and sit in judgment on them.

And though it is very fit and right that the academic standard should be an understood one, and quite different from the popular standard, still it is not enough that a young man should be able to write to a standard against which he in his heart rebels and protests. It is yet more important that you should get him to approve and adopt a standard which is accurate, if not severe. It is quite extraordinary what bombastic and immature sermons are preached in their first years in the Church by young clergymen who wrote many academic compositions in a style the most classical. It seems to be essential that a man of feeling and imagination should

be allowed fairly to run himself out. The course apparently is, that the tree should send out its rank shoots, and then that you should prune them, rather than that by some repressive means you should prevent the rank shoots coming forth at all. The way to get a high-spirited horse to be content to stay peaceably in its stall, is to allow it to have a tearing gallop, and thus get out its superfluous nervous excitement and vital spirit. Let the boiler blow off its steam. All repression is dangerous. And some injudicious folk, instead of encouraging the highly-charged mind and heart to relieve themselves by blowing off in excited verse and extravagant bombast, would (so to speak) sit on the safety-valve. Let the bursting spring flow ! It will run turbid at first ; but it will clear itself day by day. Let a young man write a vast deal : the more he writes, the sooner will the Veal be done with. But if a man write very little the bombast is not blown off ; and it may remain till advanced years. It seems as if a certain quantity of fustian must be blown off before you reach the good material. I have heard a mercantile man of fifty read a paper he had written on a social subject. He had written very little save business letters all his life. And I assure you that his paper was bombastic to a degree that you would have said was barely tolerable in a youth of twenty. I have seldom listened to Veal so outrageous. You see he had not worked through it in his youth ; and

so here it was now. I have witnessed the like phenomenon in a man who went into the Church at five-and-forty. I heard him preach one of his earliest sermons ; and I have hardly ever heard such boyish rodomontade. The imaginations of some men last out in liveliness longer than those of others ; and the taste of some men never becomes perfect ; and it is no doubt owing to these things that you find some men producing Veal so much later in life than others. You will find men who are very turgid and magniloquent at five-and-thirty, at forty, at fifty. But I attribute the phenomenon in no small measure to the fact that such men had not the opportunity of blowing off their steam in youth. Give a man at four-and-twenty two sermons to write a week, and he will very soon work through his Veal. It is probably because ladies write comparatively so little, that you find them writing at fifty poetry and prose of the most awfully romantic and sentimental strain.

We have been thinking, my friend, as you have doubtless observed, almost exclusively of intellectual and æsthetical immaturity, and of its products in composition, spoken or written. But combining with that immaturity, and going very much to affect the character of that Veal, there is moral immaturity, resulting in views, feelings, and conduct, which may be described as Moral Veal. But indeed it is very

difficult to distinguish between the different kinds of immaturity ; and to say exactly what in the moods and doings of youth proceeds from each. It is safest to rest in the general proposition that, even as the calf yields Veal, so does the immature human mind yield immature productions. It is a stage which you outgrow, and therefore a stage of comparative immaturity, in which you read a vast deal of poetry, and repeat much poetry to yourself when alone, working yourself up thereby to an enthusiastic excitement. And very like a calf you look when some one suddenly enters the room in which you are wildly gesticulating or moodily laughing, and thinking yourself poetical, and indeed sublime. The person probably takes you for a fool ; and the best you can say for yourself is that you are not so great a fool as you seem to be. Vealy is the period of life in which you filled a great volume with the verses you loved ; and in which you stored your memory, by frequent reading, with many thousands of lines. All that you outgrow. Fancy a man of fifty having his commonplace book of poetry ! And it will be instructive to turn over the ancient volume, and to see how year by year the verses copied grew fewer, and finally ceased entirely. I do not say that all growth is progress : sometimes it is like that of the muscle which once advanced into manly vigour and usefulness, but is now ossifying into rigidity. It is well to have fancy and feeling under command :

it is not well to have feeling and fancy dead. That season of life is vealy in which you are charmed by the melody of verse, quite apart from its meaning. And there is a season in which that is so. And it is curious to remark what verses they are that have charmed many men. For they are often verses in which no one else could have discerned that singular fascination. You may remember how Robert Burns has recorded that in youth he was enchanted by the melody of two lines of Addison's :—

For though in dreadful whirls we hung,
High on the broken wave.

Sir Walter Scott felt the like fascination in youth (and he tells us it was not entirely gone even in age), in Mickle's stanza :—

The dews of summer night did fall ;
The moon, sweet regent of the sky,
Silvered the walls of Cumnor Hall,
And many an oak that grew thereby.

Not a remarkable verse, I think. However, it at least presents a pleasant picture. But I remember well the enchantment which, when twelve years old, I felt in a verse by Mrs. Hemans, which I can now see presents an excessively disagreeable picture. I saw it not then ; and when I used to repeat that verse, I know it was without the slightest perception of its meaning. You know the beautiful poem called the *Battle of Morgarten*. At least I remember it as

beautiful ; and I am not going to spoil my recollection by reading it now. Here is the verse :—

Oh ! the sun in heaven fierce havoc viewed,
When the Austrian turned to fly :
And the brave, in the trampling multitude,
Had a fearful death to die !

As I write that verse (at which the critical reader will smile), I am aware that Veal has its hold of me yet. I see nothing of the miserable scene the poet describes ; but I hear the waves murmuring on a distant beach, and I see the hills across the sea, the first sea I ever beheld ; I see the school to which I went daily ; I see the class-room and the place where I used to sit ; I see the faces and hear the voices of my old companions, some dead, one sleeping in the middle of the great Atlantic, many scattered over distant parts of the world, almost all far away. Yes, I feel that I have not quite cast off the witchery of the *Battle of Morgarten*. Early associations can give to verse a charm and a hold upon one's heart which no literary excellence, however high, ever could. Look at the first hymns you learned to repeat, and which you used to say at your mother's knee ; look at the psalms and hymns you remember hearing sung at church when you were a child : you know how impossible it is for you to estimate these upon their literary merits. They may be almost doggrel ; but not Mr. Tennyson can touch you like them ! The most effective eloquence

is that which is mainly done by the mind to which it is addressed: it is *that* which touches chords which of themselves yield matchless music; it is *that* which wakens up trains of old remembrance, and which wafts around you the fragrance of the hawthorn that blossomed and withered many long years since. An English stranger would not think much of the hymns we sing in our Scotch churches: he could not know what many of them are to us. There is a magic about the words. I can discern, indeed, that some of them are mawkish in sentiment, faulty in rhyme, and on the whole what you would call extremely unfitted to be sung in public worship, if you were judging of them as new things: but a crowd of associations which are beautiful and touching gathers round the lines which have no great beauty or pathos in themselves.

You were in an extremely vealy condition when, having attained the age of fourteen, you sent some verses to the county newspaper, and with simple-hearted elation read them in the corner devoted to what was termed 'Original Poetry.' It is a pity you did not preserve the newspapers in which you first saw yourself in print, and experienced the peculiar sensation which accompanies that sight. No doubt your verses expressed the gloomiest views of life; and told of the bitter disappointments you had met in your long intercourse with mankind, and especially with womankind. And though you were

in a flutter of anxiety and excitement to see whether or not your verses would be printed, your verses probably declared that you had used up life and seen through it; that your heart was no longer to be stirred by aught on earth; and that, in short, you cared nothing for anything. You could see nothing fine, then, in being good, cheerful, and happy; but you thought it a grand thing to be a gloomy man, of a very dark complexion, with blood on your conscience, upwards of six feet high, and accustomed to wander from land to land, like Childe Harold. You were extremely vealy when you used to fancy that you were sure to be a very great man; and to think how proud your relations would some day be of you, and how you would come back and excite a great commotion at the place where you used to be a schoolboy. And it is because the world has still left some impressionable spot in your hearts, my readers, that you still have so many fond associations with 'the schoolboy spot, we ne'er forget, though we are there forgot.' They were vealy days, though pleasant to remember, my old school companions, in which you used to go to the dancing-school (it was in a gloomy theatre, seldom entered by actors), in which you fell in love with several young ladies about eleven years old; and (being permitted occasionally to select your own partners) made frantic rushes to obtain the hand of one of the beauties of that small society. Those were

the days in which you thought that when you grew up it would be a very fine thing to be a pirate, bandit, or corsair, rather than a clergyman, barrister, or the like ; even a cheerful outlaw like Robin Hood did not come up to your views ; you would rather have been a man like Captain Kyd, stained with various crimes of extreme atrocity, which would entirely preclude the possibility of returning to respectable society, and given to moody laughter in solitary moments. Oh, what truly asinine developments the human being must go through before arriving at the stage of common sense ! You were very vealy, too, when you used to think it a fine thing to astonish people by expressing awful sentiments, such as that you thought Mahommedans better than Christians, that you would like to be dissected after death, that you did not care what you got for dinner, that you liked learning your lessons better than going out to play, that you would rather read Euclid than *Ivanhoe*, and the like. It may be remarked that this peculiar vealiness is not confined to youth ; I have seen it appearing very strongly in men with gray hair. Another manifestation of vealiness, which appears both in age and youth, is the entertaining a strong belief that kings, noblemen, and baronets, are always in a condition of ecstatic happiness. I have known people pretty far advanced in life, who not only believed that monarchs must be perfectly happy, but that all who were permitted to

continue in their presence would catch a considerable degree of the mysterious bliss which was their portion. I have heard a sane man, rather acute and clever in many things, seriously say, 'If a man cannot be happy in the presence of his Sovereign, where can he be happy?'

And yet, absurd and foolish as is moral vealiness, there is something fine about it. Many of the old and dear associations most cherished in human hearts, are of the nature of Veal. It is sad to think that most of the romance of life is unquestionably so. All spooniness; all the preposterous idolization of some one who is just like anybody else; all love (in the narrow sense in which the word is understood by novel readers); you feel, when you look back, are Veal. The young lad and the young girl, whom at a pic-nic party you have discerned stealing off under frivolous pretexts from the main body of guests, and sitting on the grass by the river side, enraptured in the prosecution of a conversation which is intellectually of the emptiest, and fancying that they two make all the world, and investing that spot with remembrances which will continue till they are gray, are (it must in sober sadness be admitted) of the nature of calves. For it is beyond doubt that they are at a stage which they will outgrow, and on which they may possibly look back with something of shame. All these things, beautiful as they are, are no more than Veal. Yet

they are fitting and excellent in their time. No, let us not call them veal : they are rather like lamb, which is excellent though immature. No doubt, youth is immaturity ; and as you outgrow it you are growing better and wiser ; still youth is a fine thing, and most people would be young again if they could. How cheerful and light-hearted is immaturity ! How cheerful and lively are the little children even of silent and gloomy men ! It is sad, and it is unnatural, when they are not so. I remember yet, when I was at school, with what interest and wonder I used to look at two or three boys, about twelve or thirteen years old, who were always dull, sullen, and unhappy-looking. In those days, as a general rule, you are never sorrowful without knowing the reason why. You are never conscious of the dull atmosphere, of the gloomy spirits, of after-time. The youthful machine, bodily and mental, plays smoothly ; the young being is cheery. Even a kitten is very different from a grave old cat ; and a young colt, from a horse sobered by the cares and toils of years. And you picture fine things to yourself in your youthful dreams. I remember a beautiful dwelling I used often to see, as if from the brow of a great hill. I see the rich valley below, with magnificent woods and glades, and a broad river reflecting the sunset ; and in the midst of the valley, the vast Saracenic pile, with gilded minarets blazing in the golden light.

I have since then seen many splendid habitations, but none in the least equal to that. I cannot even yet discard the idea that somewhere in this world there stands that noble palace, and that some day I shall find it out. You remember also the intense delight with which you read the books that charmed you then : how you carried off the poem or the tale to some solitary place, how you sat up far into the night to read it, how heartily you believed in all the story, and sympathized with the people it told of. I wish I could feel now the veneration for the man who has written a book which I used once to feel. Oh that one could read the old volumes with the old feeling ! Perhaps you have some of them yet ; and you remember the peculiar expression of the type in which they are printed : the pages look at you with the face of an old friend. If you were then of an observant nature, you will understand how much of the effect of any composition upon the human mind depends upon the printing, upon the placing of the points, even upon the position of the sentences on the page. A grand, high-flown, and sentimental climax ought always to conclude at the bottom of a page. It will look ridiculous if it end four or five lines down from the top of the next page. Somehow there is a feeling as of the difference between the night before and the next morning. It is as though the crushed ball-dress and the dishevelled locks of the close of the evening

re-appeared, the same, before breakfast. Let us have homely sense at the top of the page, pathos at the foot of it. What a force in the bad type of the shabby little *Childe Harold* you used to read so often ! You turn it over in a grand illustrated edition, and it seems like another poem. Let it here be said, that occasionally you look with something like indignation on the volume which enchained you in your boyish days. For now you have burst the chain. And you have somewhat of the feeling of the prisoner towards the jailor who held him in unjust bondage. What right had that bombastic rubbish to touch and thrill you as it used to do ? Well, remember that it suits successive generations at their enthusiastic stage. There are poets whose great admirers are for the most part under twenty years old ; but probably almost every clever young person regards them at some period in his life as among the noblest of mortals. And it is no ignoble ambition to win the ardent appreciation of even immature tastes and hearts. Its brief endurance is compensated by its intensity. You sit by the fire-side and read your leisurely *Times*, and you feel a tranquil enjoyment. You like it better than the *Sorrows of Werter*, but you do not like it a twentieth part as much as you once liked the *Sorrows of Werter*. You would be interested in meeting the man who wrote that brilliant and slashing leader ; but you would not regard him with speechless awe,

as something more than human. Yet, remembering all the weaknesses out of which men grow, and on which they look back with a smile or sigh, who does not feel that there is a charm which will not depart about early youth? Longfellow knew that he would reach the hearts of most men when he wrote such a verse as this—

The green trees whispered low and mild ;
It was a sound of joy !
They were my playmates when a child,
And rocked me in their arms so wild ;
Still they looked at me and smiled,
As if I were a boy !

Such readers as are young men, will understand what has already been said as to the bitter indignation with which the writer, some years ago, listened to self-conceited elderly persons who put aside the arguments and the doings of younger men with the remark that these younger men were *boys*. There are few terms of reproach which I have heard uttered with looks of such deadly ferocity. And there are not many which excite feelings of greater wrath in the souls of clever young men. I remember how in those days I determined to write an essay, which should scorch up and finally destroy all these carping and malicious critics. It was to be called *A Chapter on Boys*. After an introduction of a sarcastic and magnificent character, setting out views substantially the same as those contained in the speech of Lord Chatham in reply to Walpole, which boys are taught

to recite at school, that essay was to go on to show that a great part of English literature was written by very young men. Unfortunately, on proceeding to investigate the matter carefully, it appeared that the best part of English literature, even in the range of poetry, was in fact written by men of even more than middle age. So the essay was never finished, though a good deal of it was sketched out. Yesterday I took out the old manuscript; and after reading a bit of it, it appeared so remarkably vealy, that I put it with indignation into the fire. Still I observed various facts of interest as to great things done by young men, and some by young men who never lived to be old. Beaumont the dramatist died at twenty-nine. Christopher Marlowe wrote *Faustus* at twenty-five, and died at thirty. Sir Philip Sidney wrote his *Arcadia* at twenty-six. Otway wrote *The Orphan* at twenty-eight, and *Venice Preserved* at thirty. Thomson wrote the *Seasons* at twenty-seven. Bishop Berkeley had devised his Ideal System at twenty-nine; and Clarke at the same age published his great work on the *Being and Attributes of God*. Then there is Pitt, of course. But these cases are exceptional; and besides, men at twenty-eight and thirty are not in any way to be regarded as boys. What I wanted was proof of the great things that had been done by young fellows about two-and-twenty; and such proof was not to be found. A man is simply a boy grown up to his

best ; and of course what is done by men must be better than what is done by boys. Unless in very peculiar cases, a man at thirty will be every way superior to what he was at twenty ; and at forty to what he was at thirty. Not indeed physically ; let *that* be granted. Not always morally ; but surely intellectually and æsthetically.

Yes, my readers, we have all been Calves. A great part of all our doings has been what the writer, in figurative language, has described as Veal. We have not said, written, or done very much on which we can now look back with entire approval. And we have said, written, and done a very great deal on which we cannot look back but with burning shame and confusion. Very many things which, when we did them, we thought remarkably good, and much better than the doings of ordinary men, we now discern, on calmly looking back, to have been extremely bad. That time, you know, my friend, when you talked in a very fluent and animated manner after dinner at a certain house, and thought you were making a great impression on the assembled guests, most of them entire strangers ; you are now fully aware that you were only making a fool of yourself. And let this hint of one public manifestation of vealiness, suffice to suggest to each of us scores of similar cases. But though we feel, in our secret souls, what calves we have been, and though

it is well for us that we should feel it deeply, and thus learn humility and caution, we do not like to be reminded of it by anybody else. Some people have a wonderful memory for the vealy sayings and doings of their friends. They may be very bad hands at remembering anything else : but they never forget the silly speeches and actions on which one would like to shut down the leaf. You may find people, a great part of whose conversation consists of repeating and exaggerating their neighbour's Veal ; and though that Veal may be immature enough and silly enough, it will go hard but your friend Mr. Snarling will represent it as a good deal worse than the fact. You will find men who while at college were students of large ambition but slender abilities, revenging themselves in this fashion upon the clever men who beat them. It is easy, very easy, to remember foolish things that were said and done even by the senior wrangler or the man who takes a double first-class ; and candid folk will think that such foolish things were not fair samples of the men ; and will remember, too, that the men have grown out of these, have grown mature and wise, and for many a year past would not have said or done such things. But if you were to judge from the conversation of Mr. Limejuice (who wrote many prize essays, but through the malice and stupidity of the judges never got any prizes), you would conclude that every word uttered by his successful rivals was one that stamped

them as essential fools, and calves which would never grow into oxen. I do not think it is a pleasing or magnanimous feature in any man's character, that he is ever eager to rake up these early follies. I would not be ready to throw in the teeth of a pretty butterfly that it was an ugly caterpillar once, unless I understood that the butterfly liked to remember the fact. I would not suggest to this fair sheet of paper on which I am writing, that not long ago it was dusty rags and afterwards dirty pulp. You cannot be an ox without previously having been a calf; you acquire taste and sense gradually; and in acquiring them you pass through stages in which you have very little of either. It is a poor burden for the memory, to collect and shovel into it the silly sayings and doings in youth of people who have become great and eminent. I read with much disgust a biography of Mr. Disraeli, which recorded, no doubt accurately, all the sore points in that statesman's history. I remember, with great approval, what Lord John Manners said in Parliament in reply to Mr. Bright, who had quoted a well-known and very silly passage from Lord John's early poetry. 'I would rather,' said Lord John, 'have been the man who in his youth wrote those silly verses, than the man who in mature years would rake them up.' And with even greater indignation I regard the individual who, when a man is doing creditably and Christianly the work of life, is ever ready to relate

and aggravate the moral delinquencies of his school-boy and student days, long since repented of and corrected. 'Remember not,' said a man who knew human nature well, 'the sins of my youth.' But there are men whose nature has a peculiar affinity for anything petty, mean, and bad. They fly upon it as a vulture on carrion. Their memory is of that cast, that you have only to make inquiry of them concerning any of their friends, to hear of something not at all to the friends' advantage. There are individuals, after listening to whom you think it would be a refreshing novelty, almost startling from its strangeness, to hear them say a word in favour of any human being whatsoever.

It is not a thing peculiar to immaturity; yet it may be remarked, that though it is an unpleasant thing to look back and see that you have said or done something very foolish, it is a still more unpleasant thing to be well aware at the time that you are saying or doing something very foolish. If a man be a fool at all, it is much to be desired that he should be a very great fool; for then he will not know when he is making a fool of himself. But it is painful not to have sense enough to know what you should do in order to be right, but to have sense enough to know that you are doing wrong. To know that you are talking like an ass, yet to feel that you cannot help it; that you must say something, and can think of nothing better to say;

this is a suffering that comes with advanced civilization. This is a phenomenon frequently to be seen at public dinners in country towns, also at the entertainment which succeeds a wedding. Men at other times rational, seem to be stricken into idiocy when they rise to their feet on such occasions; and the painful fact is, that it is conscious idiocy. The man's words are asinine, and he knows they are asinine. His wits have entirely abandoned him: he is an idiot for the time. Have you sat next a man unused to speaking at a public dinner; have you seen him nervously rise and utter an incoherent, ungrammatical, and unintelligible sentence or two, and then sit down with a ghastly smile? Have you heard him say to his friend on the other side, in bitterness, 'I have made a fool of myself!' And have you seen him sit moodily through the remainder of the feast, evidently ruminating on what he said, seeing now what he ought to have said, and trying to persuade himself that what he said was not so bad after all? Would you do a kindness to that miserable man? You have just heard his friend on the other side cordially agreeing with what he had said as to the badness of the appearance made by him. Enter into conversation with him; talk of his speech, congratulate him upon it; tell him you were extremely struck by the freshness and naturalness of what he said; that there is something delightful in hearing an unhackneyed speaker; that to

speaking with entire fluency looks professional—it is like a barrister or a clergyman. Thus you may lighten the mortification of a disappointed man; and what you say will receive considerable credence. It is wonderful how readily people believe anything they would like to be true.

I was walking this afternoon along a certain street, coming home from visiting certain sick persons, and wondering how I should conclude this essay, when, standing on the pavement on one side of the street, I saw a little boy of four years old, crying in great distress. Various individuals, who appeared to be Priests and Levites, looked as they passed at the child's distress, and passed on without doing anything to relieve it. I spoke to the little man, who was in great fear at being spoke to, but told me he had come away from his home and lost himself, and could not find his way back. I told him I would take him home if he could tell me where he lived; but he was frightened into utter helplessness, and could only tell that his name was Tom, and that he lived at the top of a stair. It was a poor neighbourhood, in which many people live at the top of stairs, and the description was vague. I spoke to two humble decent-looking women who were passing, thinking they might gain the little thing's confidence better than me; but the poor little man's great wish was just to get away from us,

though when he got two yards off he could but stand and cry. You may be sure he was not left in his trouble, but that he was put safely in his father's hands. And as I was coming home, I thought that here was an illustration of something I have been thinking of all this afternoon. I thought I saw in the poor little child's desire to get away from those who wanted to help him, though not knowing where to go when left to himself, something analogous to what the immature human being is always disposed to. The whole teaching of our life is leading us away from our early delusions and follies, from all those things about us which have been spoken of under the similitude which need not be again repeated. Yet we push away the hand that would conduct us to soberer and better things, though when left alone we can but stand and vaguely gaze about us; and we speak hardly of the growing experience which makes us wiser, and which ought to make us happier too. Let us not forget that the teaching which takes something of the gloss from life is an instrument in the kindest Hand of all; and let us be humbly content if that kindest Hand shall lead us, even by rough means, to calm and enduring wisdom—wisdom by no means inconsistent with youthful freshness of feeling, and not necessarily fatal even to youthful gaiety of mood;—and at last to that Happy Place, where worn men regain the little child's heart, and old and young are blest together!

CHAPTER VII.

GONE.

EDGAR ALLAN POE thought the most touching of all words, *Nevermore*: which, in American fashion, he made one word. American writers do the like with *Forever*, I think with bad effect. Ellesmere, in that most beautiful story of *Gretchen*, tells of a sermon he heard in Germany, in which 'that pathetic word *verloren* (lost) occurred many times.' Every one knows what Dr. Johnson wrote about *The Last*. It is, of course, a question of individual associations, and how it may strike different minds; but I stand up for the unrivalled reach and pathos of the short word GONE.

There is not very much difference, you see, between the three words. All are on the suburbs of the same idea. All convey the idea of a state of matters which existed for a time, and which is now over. All suggest that the inmost longing of most human hearts is less for a future, untried happiness

than for a return, a resurrection, beautified and unalloyed with care, of what has already been. Somehow, we are ready to feel as if we were safest and surest with *that*.

It is curious, that the saddest and most touching of human thoughts, when we run it up to its simplest form, is of so homely a thing as a material object existing in a certain space, and then removing from that space to another. *That* is the essential idea of *Gone*.

Yet, in the commonest way, there is something touching in that : something touching in the sight of vacant space, once filled by almost anything. You feel a blankness in the landscape when a tree is gone that you have known all your life. You are conscious of a vague sense of something lacking when even a post is pulled up that you remember always in the centre of a certain field. You feel this yet more when some familiar piece of furniture is taken away from a room which you know well. Here that clumsy easy-chair used to stand : and it is gone. You feel yourself an interloper, standing in the space where it stood so long. It touches you still more to look at the empty chair which you remember so often filled by one who will never fill it more. You stand in a large railway station : you have come to see a train depart. There is a great bustle on the platform, and there is a great quantity of human life, and of the interests and cares of

human life in those twelve or fourteen carriages, and filling that little space between the rails. You stand by and watch the warm interiors of the carriages, looking so large and so full, and as if they had so much in them. There are people of every kind of aspect, children and old folk, multitudes of railway rugs, of carpet-bags, of portmanteaus, of parcels, of newspapers, of books, of magazines. At length you hear the last bell ; then comes that silent steady pull, which is always striking, though seen ever so often. The train glides away : it is gone. You stand, and look vacantly at the place where it was. How little the space looks ; how blank the air ! There are the two rails, just four feet eight and a half inches apart : how close together they look ! You can hardly think that there was so much of life, and of the interests of life, in so little room. You feel the power upon the average human being of the simple, common-place fact, that something has been here, and is gone.

Then I go away, in thought, to a certain pier : a pier of wooden piles, running two hundred yards into the sea, at a quiet spot on a lovely coast, where various steam vessels call on a summer day. You stand at the seaward end of the pier, where it broadens into a considerable platform ; and you look down on the deck of a steamer lying alongside. What a bustle : what a hive of human beings, and their children, and their baggage, their hopes, fears,

and schemes, fills that space upon the water of a hundred and fifty feet long and twenty-five wide ! And what a deafening noise, too, of escaping steam fills the air ! Men with baggage dash up against you ; women shrilly vociferate above the roar of the steam ; it is a fragment of the vitality and hurry of the great city carried for a little to the quiet country place. But the last rope is thrown off ; the paddles turn ; the steamer moves—it is gone. There is the blank water churned now into foam, but in a few minutes transparent green, showing the wooden piles, encrusted with shells, and with weeds that wave about below the surface. There you stand, and look vaguely, and think vaguely. It is a curious feeling. It is a feeling you do not understand except by experience. And to a thoughtful person a thing does not become commonplace because it is repeated hundreds of thousands of times. There is something strange and something touching about even a steamboat going away from a pier at which a dozen call every day.

But you sit upon the pier, you saunter upon the beach, you read the newspapers ; you enjoy the sense of rest. The day wears away, and in the evening the steamboat comes back again. It has travelled scores of miles, and carried many persons through many scenes, while you were resting and idling through these hours ; and the feeling you had when it was gone is effaced by its return. The going

away is neutralized by the coming back. And to understand the full force of *Gone* in such a case, you must see a ship go, and see its vacant space when it is gone, when it goes away for a long time, and takes some with it who go for ever. Perhaps you know by experience what a choking sensation there is in looking at an emigrant vessel clearing out, even though you have no personal interest in any one on board. I have seen such a ship depart on her long voyage. I remember the confusion and hurry that attended her departure : the crowded deck, thronged with old and young ; grey-headed men bidding farewell to their native land ; and little children who would carry but dim remembrances of Britain to the distant Australian shore. And who that has witnessed such a scene can forget how, when the canvas was spread at length, and the last rope cast off, the outbursts of sobs and weeping arose as the great ship solemnly passed away ? You could see that many who parted there, had not understood what parting means till they were in the act of going. You could see that the old parents who were willing, they thought, to part from their boy, because they thought his chances in life were so much better in the new country, had not quite felt what parting from him was, till he was gone.

Have you ever been one of a large gay party who have made an excursion to some beautiful scene, and

had a pic-nic festival? Not that such festivals are much to be approved; at least to spots of very noble scenery. The noble scenery is vulgarized by them. There is an inconsistency in seeking out a spot which ought to awe-strike, merely to make it a theatre for eating and drinking, for stupid joking and laughter. No; let small-talk be manufactured somewhere else. And the influence of the lonely place is lost, its spirit is unfelt, unless you go alone, or go with very few, and these not boisterously merry. But let us accept the pic-nic as a fact. It has been, and the party has been very large and very lively. But go back to the place after the party is gone; go back a minute after for something forgotten; go back a month or a year after. What a little spot it is that you occupied, and how blank it looks! The place remains, but the people are gone; and we so lean to our kind, that the place alone occupies but a very little part in our recollection of any passage in our history in which there were both scenery and human life. Or go back after several years to the house where you and your brothers and sisters were children together, and you will wonder to find how small and how blank it will look. It will touch you, and perhaps deeply; but still you will discern that not places, but persons, are the true objects of human affection; and you will think what a small space of material ground may be the scene of what are to you great human events and interests. It is so with matters on a

grander scale. How little a space was ancient Greece—how little a space the Holy Land! Strip these of their history and their associations, and they are insignificant. And history and associations are invisible; and at the first glimpse of the place without them the place looks poor. Let the little child die that was the light and hope of a great dwelling, and you will understand the truth of the poet's reflection on the loss of his: 'Twas strange that such a little thing, Should leave a blank so large!'

There is no place perhaps where you have such a feeling of blankness when life has gone from it as in a church. It is less so, if the church be a very grand one, which compels you to attend to itself a good deal, even while the congregation is assembled. But if the church be a simple one, and the congregation a very large one, crowding the simple church, you hardly know it again when the congregation is gone. You could not believe that such a vast number of human beings could have been gathered in it. The place is unchanged, yet it is quite different. It is a curious feeling to look at the empty pulpit where a very great preacher once was accustomed to preach. It is especially so if it be thirty years since he used to preach there; more so, if it be many centuries. I have often looked at the pulpit whence Chalmers preached in the zenith of his fame; you can no more bring up again the excited throng that surrounded it, and the rush of the great

orator's eloquence, than when standing under a great oak in December you can call up plainly what it looked in June. And far less, standing under the dome of St. Sophia, could one recal as a present reality, or as anything but a dreamy fancy, the aspect and the eloquence of Chrysostom, ages since gone.

The feeling of *blankness*, which is the essential thing contained in the idea suggested by the word *Gone*, is one that touches us very nearly. It seems to get closer to us than even positive evil or suffering present with us. *That* fixes our attention : it arouses us ; and unless we be very weak indeed, awakens something of resistance. But in the other case, the mind is not stimulated : it is receptive, not active ; and we muse and feel, vacantly, in the thought of something gone. You are, let us suppose, a country parson ; you take your wife and children over to your railway-station, and you see them away to the seaside, whither you are not to follow for a fortnight : then you come back from the railway-station, and you reach home. The house is quite changed. How startlingly quiet it is ! You go to the nursery, usually a noisy place : you feel the silence. There are the pictures on the walls : there the little chairs : there some flowers, still quite fresh, lying upon a table, laid down by little hands. *Gone !* There is something sad in it, even with the certainty of soon meeting again—that is, so far as there is certainty

in this world. You can imagine, distantly, what it would be if the little things were gone, not to return. *That* is the GONE consummate. All who have heard it know the unutterable sadness of the farewell of the Highland emigrant leaving his native hills. You would not laugh at the bagpipes, if you heard their wild wailing tones, blending with broken voices joining in that *Macrimmon's Lament*, whose perpetual refrain is just the statement of that consummate Gone. I shall not write the Gaelic words, because you could not pronounce them : but the refrain is this: *We return, we return, we return no more!* Yes ; Gone for ever ! And all to make room for deer ! There was a man whose little boy died. The father bore up wonderfully. But on the funeral day, after the little child was laid down to his long rest, the father went out to walk in the garden. There, in a corner, was the small wheelbarrow with its wooden spade ; and the footprints in the earth left by the little feet that were gone ! You do not think the less of the strong man that at the sight he wept aloud : wept, as Some One Else had wept before him. You may remember that little poem of Longfellow's, in which he tells of a man, still young, who once had a wife and child : but wife and child were dead. There is no pathos like that of homely fact, which we may witness every day. They were gone ; and after those years in their company, he was left alone. He walked about the world, with

no one to care for him now, as they had cared. The life with them would seem like a dream, even if it had lasted for years. And all the sadder that so much of life might yet have to come. I do not mind about an old bachelor, in his solitary room. I think of the kind-hearted man, sitting in the evening in his chair by the fireside ; once, when he sat down there, little pattering feet were about him, and their little owners climbed upon his knee. Now, he may sit long enough, and no one will interrupt him. He may read his newspaper undisturbed. He may write his sermon, and no sly knock come to the door : no little dog walk in, with much barking quite unlike that of common dogs, and ask for a penny. Gone ! I remember, long ago, reading a poem called the *Scottish Widow's Lament*, written by some nameless poet. The widow had a husband and two little children, but one bleak winter they all went together : —

I ettle whiles to spin,
But wee, wee patterin' feet,
Come runnin' out and in,
And then I just maun greet :
I ken it's fancy a',
And faster flows the tear,
That my a' dwined awa',
Sin' the fa' o' the year.

You have said good-bye to a dear friend who has stayed a few days with you, and whom you will not see again for long : and you have, for a while, felt

the house very blank without him. Did you ever think how the house would seem, without yourself? Have you fancied yourself gone; and the place, blank of that figure you know? *When I am gone*; let us not say these words, unless seriously; they express what is, to each of us, the most serious of all facts. *The May Queen* has few lines which touch me more than these:—

For lying broad awake I thought of you and Effie dear;
I saw you sitting in the house, and I no longer here.

Lord Macaulay, a few years before he died, had something presented to him at a great public meeting in Scotland; something which pleased him much. ‘I shall treasure it,’ he said, ‘as long as I live; and *after I am gone*’—There the great man’s voice faltered, and the sentence remained unfinished. Yet the thought at which Macaulay broke down, may touch many a lesser man more. For when we are gone, my friends, we may leave behind us those who cannot well spare us. It is not for one’s own sake, that the *Gone*, so linked with one’s own name, touches so much. We have had enough of this world before very long; and (as Uncle Tom expressed it) ‘heaven is better than Kentuck.’ But we can think of some, for whose sake we may wish to put off our going as long as may be. ‘Our minister,’ said a Scotch rustic, ‘aye preaches aboot goin’ to heaven; but he’ll never go to heaven as long as he can get stoppin’ at Drumsleekie.’

No doubt, that fit of toothache may be gone ; or that unwelcome guest who stayed with you three weeks whether you would or not ; as well as the thing or the friend you most value. And there is the auctioneer's *Going, going*, as well as this July sun going down in glory. But I defy you to vulgarize the word. The water which makes the Atlantic will always be a sublime sight, though you may have a little of it in a dirty puddle. And though the stupid bore who comes when you are busy, and wastes your time, may tell you when you happily get rid of him, that he will often come back again to see you (ignorant that you instantly direct your servant never to admit him more), even *that* cannot detract from the beauty of Mr. Tennyson's lines, in which the dying girl, as she is going, tells her mother that after she is gone, she will (if it may be) often come back :—

If I can I'll come again, mother, from out my resting-place ;
Though you'll not see me, mother, I shall look upon your face :
Though I cannot speak a word, I shall hearken what you say,
And be often, often with you, when you think I'm far away.

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCERNING PEOPLE OF WHOM MORE MIGHT
HAVE BEEN MADE.

IT is recorded in history that at a certain public dinner in America a Methodist preacher was called on to give a toast. It may be supposed that the evening was so far advanced, that every person present had been toasted already, and also all the friends of every one present. It thus happened that the Methodist preacher was in considerable perplexity as to the question, what being, or class of beings, should form the subject of his toast. But the good man was a person of large sympathies; and some happy link of association recalled to his mind certain words with which he had a professional familiarity, and which set forth a subject of a most comprehensive character. Arising from his seat, the Methodist preacher said that, without troubling the assembled company with any preliminary observations, he begged to propose the health of **ALL PEOPLE THAT ON EARTH DO DWELL.**

248 *Concerning People of whom*

Not unnaturally, I have thought of that Methodist preacher and his toast as I begin to write this essay. For though its subject was suggested to me by various little things of very small concern to mankind in general, though of great interest to one or two individual beings, I now discern that the subject of this essay is in truth as comprehensive as the subject of that toast. I have something to say *Concerning People of whom More might have been Made*: I see now that the class which I have named includes every human being. More might have been made, in some respect, possibly in many respects, of *All people that on earth do dwell*. Physically, intellectually, morally, spiritually, more might have been made of all. Wise and diligent training on the part of others; self-denial, industry, tact, decision, promptitude, on the part of the man himself; might have made something far better than he now is of every man that breathes. No one is made the most of. There have been human beings who have been made the most of as regards some one thing; who have had some single power developed to the utmost; but no one is made the most of, all round; no one is even made the most of as regards the two or three most important things of all. And indeed it is curious to observe that the things in which human beings seem to have attained to absolute perfection, have for the most part been things comparatively frivolous; accomplishments

more might have been made. 249

which certainly were not worth the labour and the time which it must have cost to master them. Thus, M. Blondin has probably made as much of himself as can be made of mortal, in the respect of walking on a rope stretched at a great height from the ground. Hazlitt makes mention of a man who had cultivated to the very highest degree the art of playing at rackets ; and who accordingly played at rackets incomparably better than any one else ever did. A wealthy gentleman, lately deceased, by putting his whole mind to the pursuit, esteemed himself to have reached entire perfection in the matter of killing otters. Various individuals have probably developed the power of turning somersets, of picking pockets, of playing on the piano, jew's-harp, banjo, and penny trumpet, of mental calculation in arithmetic, of insinuating evil about their neighbours without directly asserting anything—to a measure as great as is possible to man. Long practice and great concentration of mind upon these things, have sufficed to produce what might seem to tremble on the verge of perfection : what unquestionably leaves the attainments of ordinary people at an inconceivable distance behind. But I do not call it making the most of a man, to develop, even to perfection, the power of turning somersets and playing at rackets. I call it making the most of a man, when you make the best of his best powers and qualities ; when you take those things about

250 *Concerning People of whom*

him which are the worthiest and most admirable, and cultivate these up to their highest attainable degree. And it is in this sense that the statement is to be understood, that no one is made the most of. Even in the best, we see no more than the rudiments of good qualities which might have been developed into a great deal more ; and in very many human beings, proper management might have brought out qualities essentially different from those which these beings now possess. It is not merely that they are rough diamonds, which might have been polished into blazing ones ; not merely that they are thoroughbred colts drawing coal-carts, which with fair training would have been new Eclipses : it is that they are vinegar which might have been wine, poison which might have been food, wild-cats which might have been harmless lambs, soured miserable wretches who might have been happy and useful, almost devils who might have been but a little lower than the angels. Oh the unutterable sadness that is in the thought of what might have been !

Not always, indeed. Sometimes, as we look back, it is with deep thankfulness that we see the point at which we were (we cannot say how) inclined to take the right turning, when we were all but resolved to take that which we can now see would have landed us in wreck and ruin. And it is fit that we should correct any morbid tendency to brood upon

more might have been made. 251

the fancy of how much better we might have been, by remembering also how much worse we might have been. Sometimes the present state of matters, good or bad, is the result of long training; of influences that were at work through many years; and that produced their effect so gradually that we never remarked the steps of the process, till some day we waken up to a sense of the fact, and find ourselves perhaps a great deal better, probably a great deal worse, than we had been vaguely imagining. But the case is not unfrequently otherwise. Sometimes one testing time decided whether we should go to the left or to the right. There are in the moral world things analogous to the sudden accident which makes a man blind or lame for life: in an instant there is wrought a permanent deterioration. Perhaps a few minutes before man or woman took the step which can never be retraced, which must banish them for ever from all they hold dear, and compel them to seek in some new country far away a place where to hide their shame and misery, they had just as little thought of taking that miserable step as you, my reader, have of taking one like it. And perhaps there are human beings in this world, held in the highest esteem, and with not a speck on their snow-white reputation, who know within themselves that they have barely escaped the gulf; that the moment has been in which all their future lot was trembling in the balance; and that a grain's weight more in

252 *Concerning People of whom*

the scale of evil, and by this time they might have been reckoned among the most degraded and abandoned of the race. But probably the first deviation, either to right or left, is in most cases a very small one. You know, my friend, what is meant by the *points* upon a railway. By moving a lever, the rails upon which the train is advancing are, at a certain place, broadened or narrowed by about the eighth of an inch. That little movement decides whether the train shall go north or south. Twenty carriages have come so far together ; but here is a junction station, and the train is to be divided. The first ten carriages deviate from the main line by a fraction of an inch at first : but in a few minutes the two portions of the train are flying on, miles apart. You cannot see the one from the other, save by distant puffs of white steam through the clumps of trees. Perhaps already a high hill has intervened, and each train is on its solitary way—one to end its course, after some hours, amid the roar and smoke and bare ugliness of some huge manufacturing town ; and the other to come through green fields to the quaint, quiet, dreamy-looking little city, whose place is marked, across the plain, by the noble spire of the grey cathedral rising into the summer blue. We come to such points in our journey through life : railway-points (as it were), which decide not merely our lot in life, but even what kind of folk we shall be, morally and intellectually. A hair's-breadth may

more might have been made. 253

make the deviation at first. Two situations are offered you at once : you think there is hardly anything to choose between them. It does not matter which you accept ; and perhaps some slight and fanciful consideration is allowed to turn the scale. But now you look back and you can see that *there* was the turning-point in your life ; it was because you went there to the right, and not to the left, that you are now a great English prelate and not a humble Scotch professor. Was there not a time in a certain great man's life, at which the lines of rail diverged, and at which the question was settled, should he be a minister of the Scotch Kirk, or should he be Lord High Chancellor of Great Britain ? I can imagine a stage in the history of a lad in a counting-house, at which the little angle of rail may be pushed in or pushed back that shall send the train to one of two places five hundred miles asunder ; it may depend upon whether he shall take or not take that half-crown, whether, thirty years after, he shall be taking the chair, a rubicund baronet, at a missionary society meeting, and receive the commendations of philanthropic peers and earnest bishops ; or be labouring in chains at Norfolk Island, a brutalized, cursing, hardened, scourge-scarred, despairing wretch, without a hope for this life or the other. Oh, how much may turn upon a little thing ! Because the railway train in which you were coming to a certain place was stopped by a

254 *Concerning People of whom*

snow-storm, the whole character of your life may have been changed. . Because some one was in the drawing-room when you went to see Miss Smith on a certain day, resolved to put to her a certain question, you missed the tide, you lost your chance, you went away to Australia and never saw her more. It fell upon a day that a ship, coming from Melbourne, was weathering a rocky point on an iron-bound coast, and was driven close upon that perilous shore. They tried to put her about ; it was the last chance. It was a moment of awful risk and decision. If the wind catches the sails, now shivering as the ship comes up, on the right side, then all on board are safe. If the wind catches the sails on the other side, then all on board must perish. And so it all depends upon which surface of certain square yards of canvas the uncertain breeze shall strike, whether John Smith, who is coming home from the diggings with twenty thousand pounds, shall go down and never be heard of again by his poor mother and sisters away in Scotland ; or whether he shall get safely back, a rich man, to gladden their hearts, and buy a pretty little place, and improve the house on it into the pleasantest picture ; and purchase, and ride, and drive various horses ; and be seen on market days sauntering in the High-street of the county town ; and get married, and run about the lawn before his door, chasing his little children ; and become a decent elder of the Church ; and live

quietly and happily for many years. Yes: from what precise point of the compass the next flaw of wind should come, would decide the question between the long homely life in Scotland, and a nameless burial deep in a foreign sea.

It seems to me to be one of the main characteristics of human beings, not that they actually are much, but that they are something of which much may be made. There are untold potentialities in human nature. The tree cut down, concerning which its heathen owner debated whether he should make it into a god or into a three-legged stool, was positively nothing in its capacity of coming to different ends and developments, when we compare it with each human being born into this world. Man is not so much a thing already, as he is the germ of something. He is (so to speak) material formed to the hand of circumstances. He is essentially a germ, either of good or evil. And he is not like the seed of a plant, in whose development the tether allows no wider range than that between the more or less successful manifestation of its inherent nature. Give a young tree fair play: good soil and abundant air; tend it carefully, in short, and you will have a noble tree. Treat the young tree unfairly: give it a bad soil, deprive it of needful air and light, and it will grow up a stunted and poor tree. But in the case of the human being, there is more than this difference in degree. There may be a difference in

256 *Concerning People of whom*

kind. The human being may grow up to be (as it were) a fair and healthful fruit tree, or to be a poisonous one. There is something positively awful about the potentialities that are in human nature. The Archbishop of Canterbury might have grown up under influences which would have made him a bloodthirsty pirate or a sneaking pickpocket. The pirate or the pickpocket, taken at the right time, and trained in the right way, might have been made a pious exemplary man. You remember that good divine, two hundred years since, who, standing in the market-place of a certain town, and seeing a poor wretch led by him to the gallows, said, 'There goes myself, but for the grace of God.' Of course, it is needful that human laws should hold all men as equally responsible. The punishment of such an offence is such an infliction, no matter who committed the offence. At least the mitigating circumstances which human laws can take into account must be all of a very plain and intelligible character. It would not do to recognise anything like a graduated scale of responsibility. A very bad training in youth would be in a certain limited sense regarded as lessening the guilt of any wrong thing done; and you may remember accordingly how that magnanimous monarch, Charles II., urged to the Scotch lords, in extenuation of the wrong things he had done, that his father had given him a very bad education. But though human laws and judges may

more might have been made. 257

vainly and clumsily endeavour to fix each wrongdoer's place in the scale of responsibility ; and though they must, in a rough way, do what is rough justice in five cases out of six ; still we may well believe that in the view of the Supreme Judge the responsibilities of men are most delicately graduated to their opportunities. There is one who will appreciate with entire accuracy the amount of guilt that is in each wrong deed of each wrongdoer, and mercifully allow for such as never had a chance of being anything but wrongdoers. And it will not matter whether it was from original constitution or from unhappy training that these poor creatures never had that chance. I was lately quite astonished to learn that some sincere but stupid American divines have fallen foul of the eloquent author of *Elsie Venner*, and accused him of fearful heresy, because he declared his confident belief that 'God would never make a man with a crooked spine and then punish him for not standing upright.' Why, that statement of the *Autocrat* appears to me at least as certain as that two and two make four. It may indeed contain some recondite and malignant reference which the stupid American divines know, and which I do not : it may be a mystic Shibboleth indicating far more than it asserts ; as at one time in Scotland it was esteemed as proof that a clergyman preached unsound doctrine if he made use of the Lord's Prayer. But, understanding it simply as

258 *Concerning People of whom*

meaning that the Judge of all the earth will do right, it appears to me an axiom beyond all question. And I take it as putting in a compact form the spirit of what I have been arguing for—to wit, that though human law must of necessity hold all rational beings as alike responsible, yet in the eye of God the difference may be immense. The graceful vase that stands in the drawing-room under a glass shade, and never goes to the well, has no great right to despise the rough pitcher that goes often and is broken at last. It is fearful to think what malleable material we are in the hands of circumstances. And a certain Authority, considerably wiser and incomparably more charitable than the American divines already mentioned, has recognised the fact when He taught us to pray, ‘Lead us not into temptation!’ We shall think, in a little while, of certain influences which may make or mar the human being; but it may be said here, that I firmly believe that happiness is one of the best of disciplines. As a general rule, if people were happier, they would be better. When you see a poor cabman on a winter day, soaked with rain, and fevered with gin, violently thrashing the wretched horse he is driving, and perhaps howling at it, you may be sure that it is just because the poor cabman is so miserable that he is doing all that. It is a sudden glimpse, perhaps, of his bare home and hungry children, and of the dreary future which lies

before himself and them, that was the true cause of those two or three furious lashes you saw him deal upon the unhappy screw's ribs. Whenever I read any article in a review, which is manifestly malignant, and intended not to improve an author but to give him pain, I cannot help immediately wondering what may have been the matter with the man who wrote the malignant article. Something must have been making him very unhappy, I think. I do not allude to playful attacks upon a man, made in pure thoughtlessness and buoyancy of spirit; but to attacks which indicate a settled, deliberate, calculating rancour. Never be angry with the man who makes such an attack; you ought to be sorry for him. It is out of great misery that malignity for the most part proceeds. To give the ordinary mortal a fair chance, let him be reasonably successful and happy. Do not worry a man into nervous irritability, and he will be amiable. Do not dip a man in water, and he will not be wet.

Of course, my friend, I know who is to you the most interesting of all beings; and whose history is the most interesting of all histories. *You* are to yourself the centre of this world, and of all the interests of this world. And this is quite right. There is no selfishness about all this, except that selfishness which forms an essential element in personality; that selfishness which must go with the fact of one's having a self. You cannot help looking

260 *Concerning People of whom*

at all things as they appear from your own point of view ; and things press themselves upon your attention and your feeling as they affect yourself. And apart from anything like egotism, or like vain self-conceit, it is probable that you may know that a great deal depends upon your exertion and your life. There are those at home who would fare but poorly if you were just now to die. There are those who must rise with you if you rise, and sink with you if you sink. Does it sometimes suddenly strike you, what a little object you are, to have so much depending on you ? Vaguely, in your thinking and feeling, you add your circumstances and your lot to your personality ; and these make up an object of considerable extension. You do so with other people as well as with yourself. You have all their belongings as a background to the picture of them which you have in your mind ; and they look very little when you see them in fact, because you see them without these belongings. I remember when a boy, how disappointed I was at first seeing the Archbishop of Canterbury. It was Archbishop Howley. There he was, a slender pale old gentleman, sitting in an arm-chair at a public meeting. I was chiefly disappointed, because there was *so little* of him. There was just the human being. There was no background of grand accessories. The idea of the Primate of England which I had in some confused manner in my mind, included a vision of

more might have been made. 261

the venerable towers of Lambeth—of a long array of solemn predecessors, from Thomas A'Becket downwards—of great historical occasions on which the Archbishop of Canterbury had been a prominent figure; and in some way I fancied, vaguely, that you would see the primate surrounded by all these things. You remember the highlander in *Waverley* who was much mortified when his chief came to meet an English guest, unattended by any retinue; and who exclaimed in consternation and sorrow, 'He has come without his tail!' Even such was my early feeling. You understand, later, that associations are not visible; and that they do not add to a man's extension in space. But (to go back) you do, as regards yourself, what you do as regards greater men; you add your lot to your personality, and thus you make up a bigger object. And when you see yourself in your tailor's shop, in a large mirror (one of a series) wherein you see your figure all round, reflected several times, your feeling will probably be, what a little thing you are! If you are a wise man, you will go away somewhat humbled, and possibly somewhat the better for the sight. You have, to a certain extent, done what Burns thought it would do all men much good to do; you have 'seen yourself as others see you.' And even to do so physically, is a step towards a juster and humbler estimate of yourself in more important things. It may here be said as a further

262 *Concerning People of whom*

illustration of the principle set forth, that people who stay very much at home, feel their stature, bodily and mental, much lessened when they go far away from home, and spend a little time among strange scenes and people. For, going thus away from home, you take only yourself. It is but a small part of your extension that goes. You go ; but you leave behind your house, your study, your children, your servants, your horses, your garden. And not only do you leave them behind ; but they grow misty and unsubstantial when you are far away from them. And somehow you feel that when you make the acquaintance of a new friend some hundreds of miles off, who never saw your home and your family, you present yourself before him, only a twentieth part or so of what you feel yourself to be when you have all your belongings about you. Do you not feel all that ? And do you not feel, that if you were to go away to Australia for ever, almost as the English coast turned blue and then invisible on the horizon, your life in England would first turn cloud-like, and then melt away ?

But without further discussing the philosophy of how it comes to be, I return to the statement that you yourself, as you live in your home, are to yourself the centre of this world ; and that you feel the force of any great principle most deeply, when you feel it in your own case. And though every worthy mortal must be often taken out of himself, especially

by seeing the deep sorrows and great failures of other men, still, in thinking of people of whom more might have been made, it touches you most to discern that you are one of these. It is a very sad thing to think of yourself, and to see how much more might have been made of you. Sit down by the fire in winter ; or go out now in summer and sit down under a tree ; and look back on the moral discipline you have gone through ; look back on what you have done and suffered. Oh how much better and happier you might have been ! And how very near you have often been to what would have made you so much happier and better ! If you had taken the other turning when you took the wrong one, after much perplexity ; if you had refrained from saying such a hasty word ; if you had not thoughtlessly made such a man your enemy ! Such a little thing may have changed the entire complexion of your life. Ah, it was because the points were turned the wrong way at that junction, that you are now running along a line of railway through wild moorlands, leaving the warm champaign below ever more hopelessly behind. Hastily, or pettedly, or despairingly, you took the wrong turning ; or you might have been dwelling now amid verdant fields and silver waters in the country of contentment and success. Many men and women, in the temporary bitterness of some disappointment, have hastily made marriages which will embitter all their future life ;

264 *Concerning People of whom*

or which at least make it certain that in this world they will never know a joyous heart any more. Men have died as almost briefless barristers, toiling into old age in heartless wrangling, who had their chance of high places on the bench ; but ambitiously resolved to wait for something higher ; and so missed the tide. Men in the Church have taken the wrong path at some critical time ; and doomed themselves to all the pangs of disappointed ambition. But I think a sincere man in the Church has a great advantage over almost all ordinary disappointed men. He has less temptation, reading affairs by the light of after time, to look back with bitterness on any mistake he may have made. For if he be the man I mean, he took the decisive step not without seeking the best of guidance ; and the whole training of his mind has fitted him for seeing a higher Hand in the allotment of human conditions. And if a man acted for the best, according to the light he had ; and if he truly believes that God puts all in their places in life : he may look back without bitterness upon what may appear the most grievous mistakes. I must be suffered to add, that if he is able heartily to hold certain great truths, and to rest on certain sure promises, hardly any conceivable earthly lot should stamp him a soured or disappointed man. If it be a sober truth, that ‘ all things shall work together for good ’ to a certain order of mankind ; and if the deepest sorrows in this world may serve to prepare us for a

more might have been made. 265

better ; why, then, I think that one might hold by a certain ancient philosopher (and something more), who said 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content !'

You see, reader, that in thinking of *People of whom more might have been made*, we are limiting the scope of the subject. I am not thinking how more might have been made of us originally. No doubt the potter had power over the clay. Give a larger brain, of finer quality, and the commonplace man might have been a Milton. A little change in the chemical composition of the grey matter of that little organ which is unquestionably connected with the mind's working as no other organ of the body is, and oh, what a different order of thought would have rolled off from your pen when you sat down and tried to write your best ! If we are to believe Robert Burns, some people have been made more of than was originally intended. A certain poem records how that which, in his homely phrase, he calls 'stuff to mak' a swine,' was ultimately converted into a very poor specimen of a human being. The poet had no irreverent intention, I dare say ; but I am not about to go into the field of speculation which is opened up by his words. I know indeed that in the hands of the Creator each of us might have been made a different man. The pounds of material which were fashioned into Shakespeare might

266 *Concerning People of whom*

have made a bumpkin with little thought beyond pigs and turnips; or, by some slight difference beyond man's skill to trace, might have made an idiot. A little infusion of energy into the mental constitution might have made the mild, pensive day-dreamer who is wandering listlessly by the river-side, sometimes chancing upon noble thoughts, which he does not carry out into action, and does not even write down on paper, into an active worker, with Arnold's keen look, who would have carved out a great career for himself, and exercised a real influence over the views and conduct of numbers of other men. A very little alteration in feature might have made a plain face into a beautiful one, and some slight change in the position or the contractibility of certain of the muscles might have made the most awkward of manners and gaits into the most dignified and graceful. All *that* we all understand. But my present subject is the making which is in circumstances after our natural disposition is fixed—the training coming from a hundred quarters, which forms the material supplied by nature into the character which each of us actually bears. And setting apart the case of great genius, whose bent towards the thing in which it will excel is so strong that it will find its own field by inevitable selection, and whose strength is such that no unfavourable circumstances can hold it down, almost any ordinary human being may be formed into almost any development. I know a huge massive

beam of rough iron, which supports a great weight. Whenever I pass it, I cannot help giving it a pat with my hand, and saying to it, 'You might have been hair-springs for watches.' I know an odd-looking little man attached to a certain railway-station, whose business it is when a train comes in to go round it with a large box of a yellow concoction, and supply grease to the wheels. I have often looked out of the carriage window at that odd little man, and thought to myself, 'Now you might have been a chief justice.' And indeed I can say from personal observation, that the stuff ultimately converted into cabinet ministers does not at an early stage at all appreciably differ from that which never becomes more than country parsons. There is a great gulf between the human being who gratefully receives a shilling, and touches his cap as he receives it, and the human being whose income is paid in yearly or half-yearly sums, and to whom a pecuniary tip would appear as an insult; yet of course that great gulf is the result of training alone. John Smith the labourer, with twelve shillings a week, and the bishop with eight thousand a year, had, by original constitution, precisely the same kind of feeling towards that much-sought yet much-abused reality which provides the means of life. Who shall reckon up by what millions of slight touches from the hand of circumstance, extending over many years, the one man is gradually formed into the

268 *Concerning People of whom*

giving of the shilling, and the other man into the receiving of it with that touch of his hat? Who shall read back the forming influences at work since the days in the cradle, that gradually formed one man into sitting down to dinner, and another man into waiting behind his chair? I think it would be occasionally a comfort if one could believe, as American planters profess to believe about their slaves, that there is an original and essential difference between men; for truly the difference in their positions is often so tremendous that it is painful to think that it is the self-same clay and the self-same common mind that are promoted to dignity and degraded to servitude. And if *you* sometimes feel *that*, *you* in whose favour the arrangement tends, what do you suppose your servants sometimes think upon the subject? It was no wonder that the millions of Russia were ready to grovel before their Czar, while they believed that he was 'an emanation from the Deity.' But in countries where it is quite understood that every man is just as much an emanation from the Deity as any other, you will not long have that sort of thing. You remember Goldsmith's noble lines, which Dr. Johnson never could read without tears, concerning the English character. Is it not true that it is just because the humble but intelligent Englishman understands distinctly that we are all of us *people of whom more might have been made*, that he has 'learnt to venerate himself as man?' And, thinking of in-

more might have been made. 269

fluences which form the character, there is a sad reflection which has often occurred to me. It is, that circumstances often develop a character which it is hard to contemplate without anger and disgust. And yet in many such cases it is rather pity that is due. The more disgusting the character formed in some men, the more you should pity them. Yet it is hard to do *that*. You easily pity the man whom circumstances have made poor and miserable ; how much more you should pity the man whom circumstances have made bad. You pity the man from whom some terrible accident has taken a limb or a hand ; but how much more should you pity the man from whom the influences of years have taken a conscience and a heart ! And something is to be said for even the most unamiable and worst of the race. No doubt it is mainly their own fault that they are so bad ; but still it is hard work to be always rowing against wind and tide, and some people could be good only by doing *that* ceaselessly. I am not thinking now of pirates and pickpockets. But take the case of a sour, backbiting, malicious, wrong-headed, lying old woman, who gives her life to saying disagreeable things and making mischief between friends. There are not many mortals with whom one is less disposed to have patience. But yet, if you knew all, you would not be so severe in what you think and say of her. You do not know the physical irritability of nerve and weakness of consti-

270 *Concerning People of whom*

tution which that poor creature may have inherited ; you do not know the singular twist of mind which she may have got from nature and from bad and unkind treatment in youth ; you do not know the bitterness of heart she has felt at the polite snubbing and ladylike tortures which in excellent society are often the share of the poor and the dependent. If you knew all these things, you would bear more patiently with my friend Miss Limejuice ; though I confess that sometimes you would find it uncommonly hard to do so.

As I wrote that last paragraph, I began dimly to fancy that somewhere I had seen the idea which is its subject treated by an abler hand by far than mine. The idea, you may be sure, was not suggested to me by books, but by what I have seen of men and women. But it is a pleasant thing to find that a thought which at the time is strongly impressing one's self, has impressed other men. And a modest person, who knows very nearly what his humble mark is, will be quite pleased to find that another man has not only anticipated his thoughts, but has expressed them much better than he could have done. Yes, let me turn to that incomparable essay of John Foster, *On a Man's writing Memoirs of Himself*. Here it is :

Make the supposition that any given number of persons, a hundred for instance, taken promiscuously, should be able to write memoirs of themselves so clear and perfect as to explain, to your discernment at least, the entire process by which their minds have attained their pre-

more might have been made. 271

sent state, recounting all the most impressive circumstances. If they should read these memoirs to you in succession, while your benevolence and the moral principles according to which you felt and estimated, were kept at the highest pitch, you would often, during the disclosure, regret to observe how many things may be the causes of irretrievable mischief. Why is the path of life, you would say, so haunted as if with evil spirits of every diversity of noxious agency, some of which may patiently accompany, or others of which may suddenly cross, the unfortunate wanderer? And you would regret to observe into how many forms of intellectual and moral perversion the human mind readily yields itself to be modified.

I compassionate you, would, in a very benevolent hour, be your language to the wealthy, unfeeling *tyrant of a family and a neighbourhood*, who seeks in the overawed timidity and unretaliated injuries of the unfortunate beings within his power, the gratification that should have been sought in their affections. Unless you had brought into the world some extraordinary refractoriness to the influence of evil, the process that you have undergone could not easily fail of being efficacious. If your parents idolized their own importance in their son so much, that they never opposed your inclinations themselves, nor permitted it to be done by any subject to their authority; if the humble companion, sometimes summoned to the honour of amusing you, bore your caprices and insolence with the meekness without which he had lost his enviable privilege; if you could despoil the garden of some nameless dependent neighbour of the carefully reared flowers, and torment his little dog or cat, without his daring to punish you or to appeal to your infatuated parents; if aged men addressed you in a submissive tone, and with the appellation of 'sir,' and their aged wives uttered their wonder at your condescension, and pushed their grandchildren away from around the fire for your sake, if you happened, though with the strut of pertness, and your hat on your head, to enter one of their cottages, perhaps to express your contempt of the homely dwelling, furniture and fare; if, in maturer life, you associated with vile persons, who would forego the contest of equality to be your allies in trampling on inferiors; and if, both then and since, you have been suffered to deem your wealth the compendium or equivalent of every ability and every good quality—it would indeed be immensely strange if you had not become, in due time, the miscreant, who may thank

272 *Concerning People of whom*

the power of the laws in civilized society that he is not assaulted with clubs and stones ; to whom one could cordially wish the opportunity and the consequences of attempting his tyranny among some such people as those submissive sons of nature in the forests of North America ; and whose dependents and domestic relatives may be almost forgiven when they shall one day rejoice at his funeral.

What do you think of *that*, my reader, as a specimen of embittered eloquence and nervous pith ? It is something to read massive and energetic sense, in days wherein mystical twaddle, and subtlety which hopelessly defies all logic, are sometimes thought extremely fine, if they are set out in a style which is refined into mere effeminacy.

I cherish a very strong conviction (as has been said) that, at least in the case of educated people, happiness is a grand discipline for bringing out what is amiable and excellent. You understand, of course, what I mean by happiness. We all know, of course, that lightheartedness is not very familiar to grown-up people, who are doing the work of life—who feel its many cares, and who do not forget the many risks which hang over it. I am not thinking of the kind of thing which is suggested to the minds of children, when they read, at the end of a tale, concerning its heroine and hero, that ‘they lived happily ever after.’ No ; we don’t look for that. By happiness, I mean freedom from terrible anxiety and from pervading depression of spirits : the consciousness that we are filling our place in life with

more might have been made. 273

decent success and approbation : religious principle and character : fair physical health throughout the family ; and moderate good temper and good sense. And I hold, with Sydney Smith, and with that keen practical philosopher, Becky Sharpe, that happiness and success tend very greatly to make people passably good. Well, I see an answer to the statement, as I do to most statements ; but, at least, the beam is never subjected to the strain which would break it. I have seen the gradual working of what I call happiness and success in ameliorating character. I have known a man who, by necessity, by the pressure of poverty, was driven to write for the magazines : a kind of work for which he had no special talent or liking, and which he had never intended to attempt. There was no more miserable, nervous, anxious, disappointed being on earth than he was when he began his writing for the press. And sure enough his articles were bitter and ill-set to a high degree. They were thoroughly ill-natured and bad. They were not devoid of a certain cleverness ; but they were the sour products of a soured nature. But that man gradually got into comfortable circumstances : and with equal step with his lot the tone of his writings mended ; till as a writer he became conspicuous for the healthful, cheerful, and kindly nature of all he produced. I remember seeing a portrait of an eminent author, taken a good many years ago, at a time when he was struggling into notice,

274 *Concerning People of whom*

and when he was being very severely handled by the critics. That portrait was really truculent of aspect. It was sour, and even ferocious-looking. Years afterwards I saw that author, at a time when he had attained vast success, and was universally recognised as a great man. How improved that face! All the savage lines were gone: the bitter look was gone: the great man looked quite genial and amiable. And I came to know that he really was all he looked. Bitter judgments of men, imputations of evil motives, disbelief in anything noble or generous, a disposition to repeat tales to the prejudice of others, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness,—all these things may possibly come out of a bad heart; but they certainly come out of a miserable one. The happier any human being is, the better and more kindly he thinks of all. It is the man who is always worried, whose means are uncertain, whose home is uncomfortable, whose nerves are rasped by some kind friend who daily repeats and enlarges upon everything disagreeable for him to hear: it is he who thinks hardly of the character and prospects of humankind, and who believes in the essential and unimprovable badness of the race.

This is not a treatise on the formation of character: it pretends to nothing like completeness. If this essay were to extend to a volume of about three hundred and eighty pages, I might be able to

more might have been made. 275

set out and discuss, in something like a full and orderly fashion, the influences under which human beings grow up, and the way in which to make the best of the best of these influences, and to evade or neutralize the worst. And if, after great thought and labour, I had produced such a volume, I am well aware that nobody would read it. So I prefer to briefly glance at a few aspects of a great subject just as they present themselves, leaving the complete discussion of it to solid individuals with more leisure at their command.

Physically, no man is made the most of. Look at an acrobat or a boxer: *there* is what your limbs might have been made for strength and agility. *That* is the potential which is in human nature in these respects. I never witnessed a prize-fight, and assuredly I never will witness one: but I am told that when the champions appear in the ring, stripped for the combat (however bestial and blackguard-looking their countenances may be), the clearness and beauty of their skin testify that by skilful physical discipline a great deal more may be made of that human hide than is usually made of it. Then if you wish to see what may be made of the human muscles as regards rapid dexterity, look at the Wizard of the North or at an Indian juggler. I am very far indeed from saying or thinking that this peculiar pre-eminence is worth the pains it must

276 *Concerning People of whom*

cost to acquire it. Not that I have a word to say against the man who maintains his children by bringing some one faculty of the body to absolute perfection: I am ready even to admit that it is a very right and fit thing that one man in five or six millions should devote his life to showing the very utmost that can be made of the human fingers, or the human muscular system as a whole: it is fit that a rare man here and there should cultivate some accomplishment to a perfection that looks magical, just as it is fit that a man here and there should live in a house that cost a million of pounds to build, and round which a wide tract of country shows what may be made of trees and fields where unlimited wealth and exquisite taste have done their best to improve nature to the fairest forms of which it is capable. But even if it were possible, it would not be desirable that all human beings should live in dwellings like Hamilton Palace or Arundel Castle; and it would serve no good end at all, certainly no end worth the cost, to have all educated men muscular as Tom Sayers, or swift of hand as Robert Houdin. Practical efficiency is what is wanted for the business of this world, not absolute perfection: life is too short to allow any but exceptional individuals, few and far between, to acquire the power of playing at rackets as well as rackets can possibly be played. We are obliged to have a great number of irons in the fire: it is needful that we should do

more might have been made. 277

decently well a great number of things ; and we must not devote ourselves to one thing to the exclusion of all the rest. And accordingly, though we may desire to be reasonably muscular and reasonably active, it will not disturb us to think that in both these respects we are people of whom more might have been made. It may here be said that probably there is hardly an influence which tends so powerfully to produce extreme self-complacency as the conviction that as regards some one physical accomplishment, one is a person of whom more could not have been made. It is a proud thing to think that you stand decidedly ahead of all mankind : that Eclipse is first and the rest nowhere ; even in the matter of keeping up six balls at once, or of noting and remembering twenty different objects in a shop window as you walk past it at five miles an hour. I do not think I ever beheld a human being whose aspect was of such unutterable pride, as a man I lately saw playing the drum as one of a certain splendid military band. He was playing in a piece in which the drum music was very conspicuous ; and even an unskilled observer could remark that his playing was absolute perfection. He had the thorough mastery of his instrument. He did the most difficult things not only with admirable precision, but without the least appearance of effort. He was a great tall fellow : and it was really a fine sight to see him standing very upright, and immovable save

278 *Concerning People of whom*

as to his arms, looking fixedly into distance, and his bosom swelling with the lofty belief that out of four or five thousand persons who were present, there was not one who, to save his life, could have done what he was doing so easily.

So much of physical dexterity. As for physical grace, it will be admitted that in that respect more might be made of most human beings. It is not merely that they are ugly and awkward naturally, but that they are ugly and awkward artificially. Sir Bulwer Lytton in his earlier writings was accustomed to maintain that just as it is a man's duty to cultivate his mental powers, so is it his duty to cultivate his bodily appearance. And doubtless, all the gifts of nature are talents committed to us to be improved ; they are things entrusted to us to make the best of. It may be difficult to fix the point at which the care of personal appearance in man or woman becomes excessive. It does so unquestionably when it engrosses the mind to the neglect of more important things. But I suppose that all reasonable people now believe that scrupulous attention to personal cleanliness, freshness, and neatness, is a Christian duty. The days are past almost everywhere in which piety was held as associated with dirt. Nobody would mention now as a proof how saintly a human being was, that (for the love of God) he had never washed his face or brushed his hair for thirty years. And even scrupulous neatness need bring with it no

more might have been made. 279

suspicion of puppyism. The most trim and tidy of old men was good John Wesley ; and he conveyed to the minds of all who saw him the notion of a man whose treasure was laid up beyond this world, quite as much as if he had dressed in such a fashion as to make himself an object of ridicule, or as if he had forsworn the use of soap. Some people fancy that slovenliness of attire indicates a mind above petty details. I have seen an eminent preacher ascend the pulpit, with his bands hanging over his right shoulder, his gown apparently put on by being dropped upon him from the vestry ceiling, and his hair apparently unbrushed for several weeks. There was no suspicion of affectation about that good man ; yet I regarded his untidiness as a defect and not as an excellence. He gave a most eloquent sermon ; yet I thought it would have been well had the lofty mind that treated so admirably some of the grandest realities of life and of immortality, been able to address itself a little to the care of lesser things. I confess that when I heard the Bishop of Oxford preach, I thought the effect of his sermon was increased by the decorous and careful fashion in which he was arrayed in his robes. And it is to be admitted that the grace of the human aspect may be in no small measure enhanced by bestowing a little pains upon it. You, youthful matron, when you take your little children to have their photographs taken, and when their nurse in contemplation of

280 *Concerning People of whom*

that event attired them in their most tasteful dresses, and arranged their hair in its prettiest curls, you know that the little things looked a great deal better than they do on common days. It is pure nonsense to say that beauty when unadorned is adorned the most. For that is as much as to say that a pretty young woman, in the matter of physical appearance, is a person of whom no more can be made. Now taste and skill can make more of almost anything. And you will set down Thomson's lines as flatly opposed to fact, when your lively young cousin walks into your room to let you see her before she goes out to an evening party; and when you compare that radiant vision, in her robes of misty texture, and with hair arranged in folds the most complicated—wreathed, and satin slippered—with the homely figure that took a walk with you that afternoon, russet-gowned, tartan-plaided, and shod with serviceable boots for tramping through country mud. One does not think of loveliness in the case of men, because they have not got any: but their aspect, such as it is, is mainly made by their tailors. And it is a lamentable thought, how very ill the clothes of most men are made. I think that the art of draping the male human body has been brought to much less excellence by the mass of those who practise it, than any other of the useful and ornamental arts. Tailors, even in great cities,

more might have been made. 281

are generally extremely bad. Or it may be that the providing of the human frame with decent and well-fitting garments is so very difficult a thing, that (save by a great genius here and there) it can be no more than approximated to. As for tailors in little country villages, their power of distorting and disfiguring is wonderful. When I used to be a country clergyman, I remember how, when I went to the funeral of some simple rustic, I was filled with surprise to see the tall, strapping, fine young country lads, arrayed in their black suits. What awkward figures they looked in those unwonted garments ! How different from their easy, natural appearance in their every-day fustian ! Here you would see a young fellow, with a coat whose huge collar covered half his head when you looked at him from behind ; a very common thing was to have sleeves which entirely concealed the hands ; and the wrinkled and baggy aspect of the whole suits could be imagined only by such as have seen them. It may be remarked here, that those strong country lads were in another respect people of whom more might have been physically made. Oh for a drill-sergeant to teach them to stand upright, and to turn out their toes ; and to get rid of that slouching, hulking gait which gives such a look of clumsiness and stupidity ! If you could but have the well-developed muscles and the fresh complexion of the country, with the

282 *Concerning People of whom*

smartness and alertness of the town ! You have there the rough material of which a vast deal may be made ; you have the water-worn pebble which will take on a beautiful polish. Take from the moorland cottage the shepherd-lad of sixteen ; send him to a Scotch college for four years ; let him be tutor in a good family for a year or two ; and (if he be an observant fellow) you will find in him the quiet, self-possessed air and the easy address of the gentleman who has seen the world. And it is curious to see one brother of a family thus educated and polished into refinement, while the other three or four, remaining in their father's simple lot, retain its rough manners and its unsophisticated feelings. Well, look at the man who has been made a gentleman, probably by the hard labour and sore self-denial of the others ; and see in him what each of the others might have been ! Look with respect on the diamond which needed only to be polished. Reverence the undeveloped potential which circumstances have held down. Look with interest on these people of whom more might have been made !

Such a sight as this sometimes sets us thinking how many germs of excellence are in this world turned to no account. You see the polished diamond and the rough one side by side. It is too late now ; but the dull colourless pebble might have been the bright glancing gem. And you may polish the

material diamond at any time ; but if you miss your season in the case of the human one, the loss can never be repaired. The bumpkin who is a bumpkin at thirty, must remain a bumpkin to threescore and ten. But another thing that makes us think how many fair possibilities are lost, is to remark the fortuitous way in which great things have often been done ; and done by people who never dreamt that they had in them the power to do anything particular. These cases, one cannot but think, are samples of millions more. There have been very popular writers who were brought out by mere accident. They did not know what precious vein of thought they had at command, till they stumbled upon it as if by chance, like the Indian at the mines of Potosi. It is not much that we know of Shakespeare, but it seems certain that it was in patching up old plays for acting that he discovered within himself a capacity for producing that which men will not easily let die. When a young military man, disheartened with the service, sought for an appointment as an Irish Commissioner of Excise, and was sadly disappointed because he did not get it, it is probable that he had as little idea as any one else had that he possessed that aptitude for the conduct of war which was to make him the Duke of Wellington. And when a young mathematician, entirely devoid of ambition, desired to settle quietly down,

284 *Concerning People of whom*

and devote all his life to that unexciting study, he was not aware that he was a person of whom more was to be made—who was to grow into the great Emperor Napoleon. I had other instances in my mind, but after these last it is needless to mention them. But such cases suggest to us that there may have been many Folletts who never held a brief, many Keans who never acted but in barns, many Vandyks who never earned more than sixpence a day, many Goldsmiths who never were better than penny-a-liners, many Michaels who never built their St. Peters; and perhaps a Shakespeare who held horses at the theatre door for pence, as the Shakespeare we know of did, and who stopped there.

Let it here be suggested, that it is highly illogical to conclude that you are yourself a person of whom a great deal more might have been made, merely because you are a person of whom it is the fact that very little has actually been made. This suggestion may appear a truism; but it is one of those simple truths of which we all need to be occasionally reminded. After all, the great test of what a man can do, must be what a man does. But there are folk who live on the reputation of being pebbles capable of receiving a very high polish, though from circumstances they did not choose to be polished. There are people who stand high in general estimation on the ground of what they might have done if they had

liked. You will find students who took no honours at the university, but who endeavour to impress their friends with the notion that if they had chosen, they could have attained to unexampled eminence. And sometimes, no doubt, there are great powers that run to waste. There have been men whose doings, splendid as they were, were no more than a hint of how much more they could have done. In such a case as that of Coleridge, you see how the lack of steady industry, and of all sense of responsibility, abated the tangible result of the noble intellect God gave him. But as a general rule, and in the case of ordinary people, you need not give a man credit for the possession of any powers beyond those which he has actually exhibited. If a boy is at the bottom of his class, it is probably because he could not attain its top. My friend Mr. Snarling thinks he can write much better articles than those which appear in any of the magazines ; but as he has not done so, I am not inclined to give him credit for the achievement. But you can see that this principle of estimating people's abilities not by what they have done, but by what they think they could do, will be much approved by persons who are stupid, and at the same time conceited. It is a pleasing arrangement that every man should fix his own mental mark, and hold by his estimate of himself. And then, never measuring his strength with others,

286 *Concerning People of whom*

he can suppose that he could have beat them if he had tried.

Yes, we are all mainly fashioned by circumstances ; and had the circumstances been more propitious, they might have made a great deal more of us. You sometimes think, middle-aged man, who never have passed the limits of Britain, what an effect might have been produced upon your views and character by foreign travel. You think what an indefinite expansion of mind it might have caused ; how many narrow prejudices it might have rubbed away ; how much wiser and better a man it might have made you. Or more society and wider reading in your early youth might have improved you ; might have taken away the shyness and the intrusive individuality which you sometimes feel painfully ; might have called out one cannot say what of greater confidence and larger sympathy. How very little, you think to yourself, you have seen and known ! While others skim great libraries, you read the same few books over and over ; while others come to know many lands and cities, and the faces and ways of many men, you look, year after year, on the same few square miles of this world, and you have to form your notion of human nature from the study of but few human beings, and these very commonplace. Perhaps it is as well. It is not so certain that more would have been made of you if you had enjoyed what might seem greater advan-

more might have been made. 287

tages. Perhaps you learned more by studying the little field before you earnestly and long, than you would have learned if you had bestowed a cursory glance upon fields more extensive by far. Perhaps there was compensation for the fewness of the cases you had to observe, in the keenness with which you were able to observe them. Perhaps the Great Disposer saw that in your case the pebble got nearly all the polishing it would stand; the man nearly all the chances he could improve.

If there be soundness and justice in this suggestion, it may afford consolation to a considerable class of men and women. I mean those people who, feeling within themselves many defects of character, and discerning in their outward lot much which they would wish other than it is, are ready to think that some one thing would have put them right; that some one thing would put them right even yet; but something which they have hopelessly missed, something which can never be. There was just one testing event, which stood between them and their being made a vast deal more of. They would have been far better and far happier, they think, had some single malign influence been kept away which has darkened all their life; or had some single blessing been given which would have made it happy. If you had got such a parish which you did not get; if you had married such a woman; if your little child had not died; if you had always

288 *Concerning People of whom*

the society and sympathy of such an energetic and hopeful friend ; if the scenery round your dwelling were of a different character ; if the neighbouring town were four miles off instead of fifteen ; if any one of these circumstances had been altered, what a different man you might have been ! Probably many people, even of middle age, conscious that the manifold cares and worries of life forbid that it should be evenly joyous, do yet cherish, at the bottom of their heart, some vague yet rooted fancy, that if but one thing were given on which they had set their hearts, or one care removed for ever, they would be perfectly happy, even here. Perhaps you overrate the effect which would have been produced on your character by such a single cause. It might not have made you much better ; it might not even have made you very different. And assuredly you are wrong in fancying that any such single thing could have made you happy ; that is, entirely happy. Nothing in this world could ever make you *that*. It is not God's purpose that we should be entirely happy here. ' This is not our rest.' The day will never come which will not bring its worry. And the possibility of terrible misfortune and sorrow hangs over all. There is but one place where we shall be right ; and *that* is far away.

Yes, more might have been made of all of us ; probably, in the case of most, not much more *will*

be made in this world. We are now, if we have reached middle life, very much what we shall be to the end of the chapter. We shall not, in this world, be much better ; let us humbly trust that we shall not be worse. Yet, if there be an undefinable sadness in looking at the marred material of which so much more might have been made, there is a sublime hopefulness in the contemplation of material, bodily and mental, of which a great deal more and better will certainly yet be made. Not much more may be made of any of us in life ; but who shall estimate what may be made of us in immortality ? Think of a 'spiritual body ;' think of a perfectly pure and happy soul ! I thought of this on a beautiful evening of this summer, walking with a much valued friend through a certain grand ducal domain. In front of a noble sepulchre, where is laid up much aristocratic dust, there are sculptured by some great artist, three colossal faces, which are meant to represent Life, Death, and Immortality. It was easy to represent death : the face was one of solemn rest, with closed eyes ; and the sculptor's skill was mainly shown in distinguishing Life from Immortality. And he had done it well. *There* was Life, a careworn, anxious, weary face, that seemed to look at you earnestly, and with a vague inquiry for something—the something that is lacking in all things here. And *there* was Immortality : life-like, but oh ! how different from mortal Life ! *There* was the beautiful

face ; calm, satisfied, self-possessed, sublime ; and with eyes looking far away. I see it yet, the crimson sunset warming the grey stone ; and a great hawthorn tree, covered with blossoms, standing by. Yes, *there* was Immortality ; and you felt, as you looked at it, that it was MORE MADE OF LIFE !

CHAPTER IX.

CONCERNING PEOPLE WHO CARRIED WEIGHT
IN LIFE.WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON THOSE WHO NEVER HAD A
CHANCE.

YOU drive out, let us suppose, upon a certain day. To your surprise and mortification, your horse, usually lively and frisky, is quite dull and sluggish. He does not get over the ground as he is wont to do. The slightest touch of whipcord, on other days, suffices to make him dart forward with redoubled speed ; but upon this day, after two or three miles, he needs positive whipping, and he runs very sulkily with it all. By and bye his coat, usually smooth and glossy and dry through all reasonable work, begins to stream like a water-cart. This will not do. There is something wrong. You investigate ; and you discover that your horse's work, though seemingly the same as usual, is in fact immensely greater. The blockheads who oiled your wheels yesterday have screwed up your patent axles

292 *Concerning People who*

too tightly ; the friction is enormous ; the hotter the metal gets, the greater grows the friction ; your horse's work is quadrupled. You drive slowly home ; and severely upbraid the blockheads.

There are many people who have to go through life at an analogous disadvantage. There is something in their constitution of body or mind ; there is something in their circumstances ; which adds incalculably to the exertion they must go through to attain their ends ; and which holds them back from doing what they might otherwise have done. Very probably, that malign something exerted its influence unperceived by those around them. They did not get credit for the struggle they were making. No one knew what a brave fight they were making with a broken right arm ; no one remarked that they were running the race, and keeping a fair place in it too, with their legs tied together. All they do, they do at a disadvantage. It is as when a noble race-horse is beaten by a sorry hack ; because the race-horse, as you might see if you look at the list, is carrying twelve pounds additional. But such men, by a desperate effort, often made silently and sorrowfully, may (so to speak) run in the race ; and do well in it ; though you little think with how heavy a foot and how heavy a heart. There are others, who have no chance at all. *They* are like a horse set to run a race, tied by a strong rope to a tree ; or weighted with ten tons of extra burden.

That horse cannot run, even poorly. The difference between their case and that of the men who are placed at a disadvantage, is like the difference between setting a very near-sighted man to keep a sharp look-out, and setting a man who is quite blind to keep that sharp look-out. Many can do the work of life with difficulty ; some cannot do it at all. In short, there are PEOPLE WHO CARRY WEIGHT IN LIFE ; and there are some WHO NEVER HAVE A CHANCE.

And you, my friend, who are doing the work of life well and creditably : you who are running in the front rank, and likely to do so to the end ; think kindly and charitably of those who have broken down in the race. Think kindly of him who, sadly over-weighted, is struggling onwards away half-a-mile behind you ; think more kindly yet, if that be possible, of him who, tethered to a ton of granite, is struggling hard and making no way at all ; or who has even sat down and given up the struggle in dumb despair. You feel, I know, the weakness in yourself which would have made you break down if sorely tried like others. You know there is in your armour the unprotected place at which a well-aimed or a random blow would have gone home and brought you down. Yes, you are nearing the winning-post, and you are among the first ; but six pounds more on your back, and you might have been nowhere. You feel, by your weak

heart and weary frame, that if you had been sent to the Crimea in that dreadful first winter, you would certainly have died. And you feel, too, by your lack of moral stamina, by your feebleness of resolution, that it has been your preservation from you know not what depths of shame and misery, that you never were pressed very hard by temptation. Do not range yourself with those who found fault with a certain great and good Teacher of former days, because he went to be guest with a man that was a sinner. As if He could have gone to be guest with any man who was not !

There is no reckoning up the manifold *impedimenta* by which human beings are weighted for the race of life ; but all may be classified under the two heads of unfavourable influences arising out of the mental or physical nature of the human beings themselves, and unfavourable influences arising out of the circumstances in which the human beings are placed. You have known men who, setting out from a very humble position, have attained to a respectable standing : but who would have reached a very much higher place but for their being weighted with a vulgar, violent, wrong-headed, and rude-spoken wife. You have known men of lowly origin, who had in them the makings of gentlemen ; but whom this single malign influence has condemned to coarse manners and a frowsy re-

pulsive home for life. You have known many men whose powers are crippled and their nature soured by poverty ; by the heavy necessity for calculating how far each shilling will go ; by a certain sense of degradation that comes of sordid shifts. How can a poor parson write an eloquent or spirited sermon, when his mind all the while is running upon the thought how he is to pay the baker, or how he is to get shoes for his children ? It will be but a dull discourse which, under that weight, will be produced even by a man who, favourably placed, could have done very considerable things. It is only a great genius here and there, who can do great things, who can do his best, no matter at what disadvantage he may be placed ; the great mass of ordinary men can make little headway with wind and tide dead against them. Not many trees would grow well, if watered daily (let us say) with vitriol. Yet a tree which would speedily die under that nurture, might do very fairly, might even do magnificently, if it had fair play ; if it got its chance of common sunshine and shower. Some men, indeed, though always hampered by circumstances, have accomplished much ; but then you cannot help thinking how much more they might have accomplished had they been placed more happily. Pugin, the great Gothic architect, designed various noble buildings ; but I believe he complained that he never had fair play with his finest ; that he was always weighted by

considerations of expense, or by the nature of the ground he had to build on, or by the number of people it was essential the building should accommodate. And so he regarded his noblest edifices as no more than hints of what he could have done. He made grand running in the race; but oh what running he could have made if you had taken off those twelve additional pounds! I dare say you have known men who laboured to make a pretty country house on a site which had some one great drawback. They were always battling with that drawback, and trying to conquer it; but they never could quite succeed. And it remained a real worry and vexation. Their house was on the north side of a high hill, and never could have its due share of sunshine. Or you could not reach it but by climbing a very steep ascent; or you could not in any way get water into the landscape. When Sir Walter was at length able to call his own a little estate on the banks of the Tweed he loved so well, it was the ugliest, bleakest, and least interesting spot upon the course of that beautiful river; and the public road ran within a few yards of his door. The noble-hearted man made a charming dwelling at last; but he was fighting against nature in the matter of the landscape round it; and you can see yet, many a year after he left it, the poor little trees of his beloved plantations, contrasting with the magnificent timber of various grand old places above

and below Abbotsford. There is something sadder in the sight of men who carried weight within themselves ; and who, in aiming at usefulness or at happiness, were hampered and held back by their own nature. There are many men who are weighted with a hasty temper ; weighted with a nervous anxious constitution ; weighted with an envious, jealous disposition ; weighted with a strong tendency to evil speaking, lying, and slandering ; weighted with a grumbling, sour, discontented spirit ; weighted with a disposition to vapouring and boasting ; weighted with a great want of common sense ; weighted with an undue regard to what other people may be thinking or saying of them ; weighted with many like things of which more will be said by and bye. When that good missionary, Henry Martyn, was in India, he was weighted with an irresistible drowsiness. He could hardly keep himself awake. And it must have been a burning earnestness that impelled him to ceaseless labour, in the presence of such a drag-weight as that. I am not thinking or saying, my friend, that it is wholly bad for us to carry weight ; that great good may not come of the abatement of our power and spirit which may be made by that weight. I remember a greater missionary than even the sainted Martyn, to whom the Wisest and Kindest appointed that he should carry weight, and that he should fight at a sad disadvantage. And the greater missionary tells us that he knew why

that weight was appointed him to carry ; and that he felt he needed it all to save him from a strong tendency to undue self-conceit. No one knows, now, what the burden was which he bore ; but it was heavy and painful ; it was ‘ a thorn in the flesh ;’ three times he earnestly asked that it might be taken away ; but the answer he got implied that he needed it yet ; and that his Master thought it a better plan to strengthen the back than to lighten the burden. Yes, the blessed Redeemer appointed that St. Paul should carry weight in life ; and I think, friendly reader, that we shall believe that it is wisely and kindly meant, if the like should come to you and me.

We all understand what is meant when we hear it is said that a man is doing very well, or has done very well, *considering*. I do not know whether it is a Scotticism to stop short at that point of the sentence. We do it, constantly, in this country : the sentence would be completed by saying, *considering the weight he has to carry*, or *the disadvantage at which he works*. And things which are *very good, considering*, may range very far up and down the scale of actual merit. A thing which is *very good, considering*, may be very bad, or may be tolerably good. It never can be absolutely very good ; for, if it were, you would cease to use the word *considering*. A thing which is absolutely very good, if it have been done under extremely unfavourable circumstances, would not be described as

very good, considering ; it would be described as *quite wonderful, considering*, or as *miraculous, considering*. And it is curious how people take a pride in accumulating unfavourable circumstances, that they may overcome them, and gain the glory of having overcome them. Thus, if a man wishes to sign his name, he might write the letters with his right hand ; and though he write them very clearly and well and rapidly, nobody would think of giving him any credit. But if he write his name rather badly with his left hand, people would say it was a remarkable signature, considering. And if he wrote his name, very ill indeed, with his foot, people would say the writing was quite wonderful, considering. If a man desire to walk from one end of a long building to the other, he might do so by walking along the floor ; and though he did so steadily, swiftly, and gracefully, no one would remark that he had done anything worth notice. But if he choose for his path a thick rope, extended from one end of the building to the other, at a height of a hundred feet ; and if he walk rather slowly and awkwardly along it, he will be esteemed as having done something very extraordinary ; while if, in addition to this, he is blindfolded, and has his feet placed in large baskets instead of shoes, he will, if in any way he can get over the distance between the ends of the building, be held as one of the most remarkable men of the age. Yes, load yourself with weight

which no one asks you to carry : accumulate disadvantages which you need not face unless you choose ; then carry the weight in any fashion, and overcome the disadvantages in any fashion ; and you are a great man, considering ; that is, considering the disadvantages and the weight. Let this be remembered : if a man is so placed that he cannot do his work, except in the face of special difficulties, then let him be praised if he vanquish these in some decent measure, and if he do his work tolerably well. But a man deserves no praise at all for work which he has done tolerably or done rather badly, because he chose to do it under disadvantageous circumstances, under which there was no earthly call upon him to do it. In this case he probably is a self-conceited man, or a man of wrong-headed independence of disposition ; and in this case, if his work be bad absolutely, don't tell him that it is good, considering. Refuse to consider. He has no right to expect that you should. There was a man who built a house entirely with his own hands. He had never learned either mason work or carpentry : he could quite well have afforded to pay skilled workmen to do the work he wanted ; but he did not choose to do so. He did the whole work himself. The house was finished : its aspect was peculiar. The walls were off the perpendicular considerably, and the windows were singular in shape, the doors fitted badly, and the floors were far from level. In

short, it was a very bad and awkward-looking house ; but it was a wonderful house, considering. And people said that it was so, who saw nothing wonderful in the beautiful house next it, perfect in symmetry and finish and comfort, but built by men whose business it was to build. Now, I should have declined to admire that odd house, or to express the least sympathy with its builder. He chose to run with a needless hundredweight on his back : he chose to walk in baskets instead of in shoes. And if, in consequence of his own perversity, he did his work badly, I should have refused to recognise it as anything but bad work. It was quite different with Robinson Crusoe, who made his dwelling and his furniture for himself, because there was no one else to make them for him. I dare say his cave was anything but exactly square, and his chairs and tables were cumbrous enough ; but they were wonderful, considering certain facts which he was quite entitled to expect us to consider. Southey's *Cottonian Library* was all quite right ; and you would have said that the books were very nicely bound, considering ; for Southey could not afford to pay the regular binder's charges ; and it was better that his books should be done up in cotton of various hues by the members of his own family, than that they should remain not bound at all. You will think, too, of the poor old parson who wrote a book which he thought of great value, but which no publisher

would bring out. He was determined that all his labour should not be lost to posterity. So he bought types and a printing-press, and printed his precious work, poor man ; he and his man-servant did it all. It made a great many volumes ; and the task took up many years. Then he bound the volumes with his own hands ; and carrying them to London, he placed a copy of his work in each of the public libraries. I dare say he might have saved himself his labour. How many of my readers could tell what was the title of the work, or what was the name of its author ? Still, *there* was a man who accomplished his design, in the face of every disadvantage.

There is a great point of difference between our feeling towards the human being who runs his race much overweighted, and our feeling towards the inferior animal that does the like. If you saw a poor horse gamely struggling in a race, with a weight of a ton extra, you would pity it. Your sympathies would all be with the creature that was making the best of unfavourable circumstances. But it is a sorrowful fact, that the drag weight of human beings not unfrequently consists of things which make us angry rather than sympathetic. You have seen a man carrying heavy weight in life, perhaps in the form of inveterate wrongheadedness and suspiciousness ; but instead of pitying him, our impulse would rather be to beat him upon that perverted head. We

pity physical malformation or unhealthiness; but our bent is to be angry with intellectual and moral malformation or unhealthiness. We feel for the deformed man, who must struggle on at that sad disadvantage; feeling it, too, much more acutely than you would readily believe. But we have only indignation for the man weighted with far worse things; and things which, in some cases at least, he can just as little help. You have known men whose extra pounds, or even extra ton, was a hasty temper, flying out of a sudden into ungovernable outbursts: or a moral cowardice leading to trickery and falsehood: or a special disposition to envy and evil-speaking: or a very strong tendency to morbid complaining about his misfortunes and troubles: or an invincible bent to be always talking of his sufferings through the derangement of his digestive organs. Now, you grow angry at these things. You cannot stand them. And there is a substratum of truth to that angry feeling. A man *can* form his mind more than he can form his body. If a man be well-made, physically, he will, in ordinary cases, remain so: but he may, in a moral sense, raise a great hunchback where nature made none. He may foster a malignant temper, a grumbling, fretful spirit, which by manful resistance might be much abated, if not quite put down. But still, there should often be pity, where we are prone only to blame. We find a person in whom a truly disgusting character has been formed:

304 *Concerning People who*

well, if you knew all, you would know that the person had hardly a chance of being otherwise : the man could not help it. You have known people who were awfully unamiable and repulsive : you may have been told how very different they once were, — sweet-tempered and cheerful. And surely the change is a far sadder one than that which has passed upon the wrinkled old woman, who was once (as you are told) the loveliest girl of her time. Yet many a one who will look with interest upon the withered face and the dimmed eyes, and try to trace in them the vestiges of radiant beauty gone, will never think of puzzling out in violent spurts of petulance the perversion of a quick and kind heart ; or in curious oddities and pettinesses the result of long and lonely years of toil in which no one sympathized ; or in cynical bitterness and misanthropy, an old disappointment never got over. There is a hard knot in the wood, where a green young branch was lopped away. I have a great pity for old bachelors. Those I have known have for the most part been old fools. But the more foolish and absurd they are, the more pity is due to them. I believe there is something to be said for even the most unamiable creatures. The shark is an unamiable creature. It is voracious. It will snap a man in two. Yet it is not unworthy of sympathy. Its organization is such that it is always suffering the most ravenous hunger. You can hardly imagine the state of intolerable famine in

which that unhappy animal roams the ocean. People talk of its awful teeth and its vindictive eye. I suppose it is well ascertained that the extremity of physical want, as reached on rafts at sea, has driven human beings to deeds as barbarous as ever shark was accused of. The worse a human being is, the more he deserves our pity. Hang him, if *that* be needful for the welfare of society ; but pity him even as you hang. Many a poor creature has gradually become hardened and inveterate in guilt, who would have shuddered at first had the excess of it ultimately reached been at first presented to view. But the precipice was sloped off : the descent was made step by step. And there is many a human being who never had a chance of being good : many who have been trained, and even compelled, to evil from very infancy. Who that knows anything of our great cities, but knows how the poor little child, the toddling innocent, is sometimes sent out day by day to steal ; and received in his wretched home with blows and curses if he fail to bring back enough : who has not heard of such poor little things, unsuccessful in their sorry work, sleeping all night in some wintry stair, because they durst not venture back to their drunken, miserable, desperate parents ? I could tell things at which angels might shed tears, with much better reason for doing so than seems to me to exist in some of those more imposing occasions on which bombastic writers are wont to describe them

as weeping. Ah, there is One who knows where the responsibility for all this rests! Not wholly with the wretched parents: far from *that*. *They*, too, have gone through the like: they had as little chance as their children. *They* deserve our deepest pity too. Perhaps the deeper pity is not due to the shivering, starving child, with the bitter wind cutting through its thin rags, and its blue feet on the frozen pavement, holding out a hand that is like the claw of some beast, but rather to the brutalized mother who could thus send out the infant she bore. Surely the mother's condition, if we look at the case aright, is the more deplorable. Would not you, my reader, rather endure any degree of cold and hunger than come to this! Doubtless, there is blame somewhere that such things should be: but we all know that the blame of the most miserable practical evils and failures can hardly be traced to particular individuals. It is through the incapacity of scores of public servants that an army is starved. It is through the fault of millions of people that our great towns are what they are: and it must be confessed that the actual responsibility is spread so thinly over so great a surface, that it is hard to say it rests very blackly upon any one spot. Oh, that we could but know whom to hang, when we find some flagrant, crying evil! Unluckily, hasty people are ready to be content if they can but hang anybody, without minding much whether that individual be more to blame than

many beside. Laws and kings have something to do here : but management and foresight on the part of the poorer classes have a great deal more to do. And no laws can make many persons managing or provident. I do not hesitate to say, from what I have myself seen of the poor, that the same shortsighted extravagance, the same recklessness of consequences, which are frequently found in them, would cause quite as much misery if they prevailed in a like degree among people with a thousand a-year. But it seems as if only tolerably well-to-do people have the heart to be provident and self-denying. A man with a few hundreds annually does not marry unless he thinks he can afford it : but the workman with fifteen shillings a week is profoundly indifferent to any such calculation. I firmly believe that the sternest of all self-denial is that practised by those who, when we divide mankind into rich and poor, must be classed (I suppose) with the rich. But I turn away from a miserable subject, through which I cannot see my way clearly, and on which I cannot think but with unutterable pain. It is an easy way of cutting the knot to declare that the rich are the cause of all the sufferings of the poor ; but when we look at the case in all its bearings, we shall see that *that* is rank nonsense. And on the other hand, it is unquestionable that the rich are bound to do something. But what ? I should feel deeply indebted to any one who would write out, in a few

308 *Concerning People who*

short and intelligible sentences, the practical results that are aimed at in the *Song of the Shirt*. The misery and evil are manifest : but tell us whom to hang ; tell us what to do !

One heavy burden with which many men are weighted for the race of life, is depression of spirits. I wonder whether this used to be as common in former days as it is now. There was, indeed, the man in Homer, who walked by the sea-shore in a very gloomy mood ; but his case seems to have been thought remarkable. What is it in our modern mode of life, and our infinity of cares ; what little thing is it about the matter of the brain, or the flow of the blood, that makes the difference between buoyant cheerfulness and deep depression ? I begin to think that almost all educated people, and especially all whose work is mental rather than physical, suffer more or less from this indescribable gloom. And although a certain amount of sentimental sadness may possibly help the poet, or the imaginative writer, to produce material which may be very attractive to the young and inexperienced, I suppose it will be admitted by all that cheerfulness and hopefulness are noble and healthful stimulants to worthy effort, and that depression of spirits does (so to speak) cut the sinews with which the average man must do the work of life. You know how lightly the buoyant heart carries people through en-

tanglements and labours under which the desponding would break down, or which they never would face. Yet, in thinking of the commonness of depressed spirits, even where the mind is otherwise very free from anything morbid, we should remember that there is a strong temptation to believe that this depression is more common and more prevalent than it truly is. Sometimes there is a gloom which overcasts all life, like that in which James Watt lived and worked, and served his race so nobly ; like that from which the gentle, amiable poet, James Montgomery, suffered through his whole career. But in ordinary cases the gloom is temporary and transient. Even the most depressed are not always so. Like, we know, suggests like powerfully. If you are placed in some peculiar conjuncture of circumstances, or if you pass through some remarkable scene, the present scene or conjuncture will call up before you in a way that startles you, something like itself which you had long forgotten, and which you would never have remembered but for this touch of some mysterious spring. And accordingly, a man depressed in spirits thinks that he is always so, or at least fancies that such depression has given the colour to his life in a very much greater degree than it actually has done so. For this dark season wakens up the remembrance of many similar dark seasons which in more cheerful days are quite forgot, and these cheerful days drop out of memory for the

time. Hearing such a man speak, if he speak out his heart to you, you think him inconsistent, perhaps you think him insincere. You think he is saying more than he truly feels. It is not so; he feels and believes it all at the time. But he is taking a one-sided view of things; he is undergoing the misery of it acutely for the time: by and bye he will see things from quite a different point. A very eminent man (there can be no harm in referring to a case which he himself made so public) wrote and published something about his *miserable home*. He was quite sincere, I do not doubt. He thought so at the time. He *was* miserable just then; and so, looking back on past years, he could see nothing but misery. But the case was not really so, one could feel sure. There had been a vast deal of enjoyment about his home and his lot; it was forgotten, then. A man in very low spirits, reading over his diary, somehow lights upon and dwells upon all the sad and wounding things; he involuntarily skips the rest, or reads them with but faint perception of their meaning. In reading the very Bible, he does the like thing. He chances upon that which is in unison with his present mood. I think there is no respect in which this great law of the association of ideas holds more strictly true, than in the power of a present state of mind, or a present state of outward circumstances, to bring up vividly before us all such states in our past history. We

are depressed, we are worried ; and when we look back, all our departed days of worry and depression appear to start up and press themselves upon our view to the exclusion of anything else ; so that we are ready to think that we have never been otherwise than depressed and worried all our life. But when more cheerful times come, they suggest only such times of cheerfulness, and no effort will bring back the depression vividly as when we felt it. It is not selfishness or heartlessness, it is the result of an inevitable law of mind, that people in happy circumstances should resolutely believe that it is a happy world after all ; for looking back, and looking around, the mind refuses to take distinct note of anything that is not somewhat akin to its present state. And so, if any ordinary man, who is not a distempered genius or a great fool, tells you that he is always miserable, don't believe him. He feels so now, but he does not always feel so. There are periods of brightening in the darkest lot. Very, very few live in unvarying gloom. Not but what there is something very pitiful (by which I mean deserving of pity) in what may be termed the Micawber style of mind ; in the stage of hysteric oscillations between joy and misery. Thoughtless readers of *David Copperfield* laugh at Mr. Micawber, and his rapid passages from the depth of despair to the summit of happiness, and back again. But if you have seen or experienced that morbid

condition, you would know that there is more reason to mourn over it than to laugh at it. There is acute misery felt now and then ; and there is a pervading, never-departing sense of the hollowness of the morbid mirth. It is but a very few degrees better than 'moody madness, laughing wild, amid severest woe.' By depression of spirits, I understand a dejection without any cause that could be stated, or from causes which in a healthy mind would produce no such degree of dejection. No doubt many men can remember seasons of dejection which was not imaginary, and of anxiety and misery whose causes were only too real. You can remember, perhaps, the dark time in which you knew quite well what it was that made it so dark. Well, better days have come. That sorrowful, wearing time, which exhausted the springs of life faster than ordinary living would have done, which aged you in heart and frame before your day, dragged over, and it is gone. You carried heavy weight, indeed, while it lasted. It was but poor running you made, poor work you did, with that feeble, anxious, disappointed, miserable heart. And you would many a time have been thankful to creep into a quiet grave. Perhaps that season did you good. Perhaps it was the discipline you needed. Perhaps it took out your self-conceit, and made you humble. Perhaps it disposed you to feel for the grief and cares of others, and made you sympathetic. Perhaps, looking back now, you can discern the end

it served. And now that it has done its work, and that it only stings you when you look back, let that time be quite forgotten !

There are men, and very clever men, who do the work of life at a disadvantage, through *this*, that their mind is a machine fitted for doing well only one kind of work ; or that their mind is a machine which, though doing many things well, does some one thing, perhaps a conspicuous thing, very poorly. You find it hard to give a man credit for being possessed of sense and talent, if you hear him make a speech at a public dinner, which speech approaches the idiotic for its silliness and confusion. And the vulgar mind readily concludes that he who does one thing extremely ill, can do nothing well ; and that he who is ignorant on one point, is ignorant on all. A friend of mine, a country parson, on first going to his parish, resolved to farm his glebe for himself. A neighbouring farmer kindly offered the parson to plough one of his fields. The farmer said that he would send his man John with a plough and a pair of horses on a certain day. ‘If ye’re goin’ about,’ said the farmer to the clergyman, ‘John will be unco’ weel pleased if you speak to him, and say it’s a fine day, or the like o’ that ; but dinna,’ said the farmer, with much solemnity, ‘dinna say onything to him aboot ploughin’ and sawin’, for John,’ he added, ‘is a stupid body, but he has been ploughin’ and

sawin' all his life, and he'll see in a minute that ye ken naething aboot ploughin' and sawin.' And then,' said the sagacious old farmer, with extreme earnestness, 'if he comes to think that ye ken naething aboot ploughin' and sawin', he'll think that ye ken naething about anything!' Yes, it is natural to us all to think that if the machine breaks down at that work in which we are competent to test it, then the machine cannot do any work at all.

If you have a strong current of water, you may turn it into any channel you please, and make it do any work you please. With equal energy and success it will flow north or south; it will turn a corn-mill, or a threshing-machine, or a grindstone. Many people live under a vague impression that the human mind is like that. They think—Here is so much ability, so much energy, which may be turned in any direction, and made to do any work; and they are surprised to find that the power, available and great for one kind of work, is worth nothing for another. A man very clever at one thing, is positively weak and stupid at another thing. A very good judge may be a wretchedly bad joker; and he must go through his career at this disadvantage, that people, finding him silly at the thing they are able to estimate, find it hard to believe that he is not silly at everything. I know for myself that it would not be right that the Premier should request me to look out for a suitable Chan-

cellor. I am not competent to appreciate the depth of a man's knowledge of equity ; by which I do not mean justice, but chancery law. But though quite unable to understand how great a Chancellor Lord Eldon was, I am quite able to estimate how great a poet he was ; also how great a wit. Here is a poem by that eminent person. Doubtless he regarded it as a wonder of happy versification, as well as instinct with the most convulsing fun. It is intended to set out in a metrical form, the career of a certain judge, who went up as a poor lad from Scotland to England, but did well at the bar, and ultimately found his place upon the bench. Here is Lord Chancellor Eldon's humorous poem :

James Allan Parke
Came naked stark,
From Scotland ;
But he got clothes,
Like other beaux,
In England !

Now the fact that Lord Eldon wrote that poem, and valued it highly, would lead some folk to suppose that Lord Eldon was next door to an idiot. And a good many other things which that Chancellor did, such as his quotations from Scripture in the House of Commons, and his attempts to convince that assemblage (when Attorney-General) that Napoleon I. was the Apocalyptic Beast or the Little Horn, certainly point towards the same conclusion. But

316 *Concerning People who*

the conclusion, as a general one, would be wrong. No doubt Lord Eldon was a wise and sagacious man as judge and statesman, though as wit and poet he was almost an idiot. So with other great men. It is easy to remember occasions on which great men have done very foolish things. There never was a truer hero nor a greater commander than Lord Nelson : but in some things he was merely an awkward, overgrown midshipman. But, then, let us remember, that a locomotive engine, though excellent at running, would be a poor hand at flying. *That* is not its vocation. The engine will draw fifteen heavy carriages fifty miles in an hour ; and *that* remains as a noble feat, even though it be ascertained that the engine could not jump over a brook which would be cleared easily by the veriest screw. We all see this. But many of us have a confused idea that a great and clever man is (so to speak) a locomotive that can fly ; and when it is proved that he cannot fly, then we begin to doubt whether he can even run. We think he should be good at everything, whether in his own line or not. And he is set at a disadvantage, particularly in the judgment of vulgar and stupid people, when it is clearly ascertained that at some things he is very inferior. I have heard of a very eminent preacher who sunk considerably (even as regards his preaching) in the estimation of a certain family, because it appeared that he played very badly at bowls. And we all

know that occasionally the Premier already mentioned reverses the vulgar error, and in appointing men to great places, is guided by an axiom which amounts to just this : this locomotive can run well, therefore it will fly well. This man has filled a certain position well, therefore let us appoint him to a position entirely different ; no doubt he will do well there too. Here is a clergyman who has edited certain Greek plays admirably : let us make him a bishop.

It may be remarked here, that the men who have attained the greatest success in the race of life, have generally carried weight. *Nitor in adversum* might be the motto of many a man, besides Burke. It seems to be almost a general rule, that the raw material out of which the finest fabrics are made, should look very little like these, to start with. It was a stammerer, of uncommanding mien, who became the greatest orator of graceful Greece. I believe it is admitted that Chalmers was the most effective preacher, perhaps the most telling speaker, that Britain has seen for at least a century ; yet his aspect was not dignified, his gestures were awkward, his voice was bad, and his accent frightful. He talked of an *oppning* when he meant an *opening* ; and he read out the text of one of his noblest sermons, ‘He that is fulthy, let him be fulthy stull.’ Yet who ever thought of these things, after hearing

the good man for ten minutes ! Ay, load Eclipse with what extra pounds you might, Eclipse would always be first ! And, to descend to the race-horse, *he* had four white legs, white to the knees ; and he ran more awkwardly than racer ever did, with his head between his forelegs, close to the ground, like a pig. Alexander, Napoleon, and Wellington, were all little men ; in places where a commanding presence would have been of no small value. A most disagreeably affected manner has not prevented a barrister, with no special advantages, from rising with general approval to the highest places which a barrister can fill. A hideous little wretch has appeared for trial in a Criminal Court, having succeeded in marrying seven wives at once. A painful hesitation has not hindered a certain eminent person from being one of the principal speakers in the British Parliament, for many years. Yes, even disadvantages never overcome have not sufficed to hold in obscurity men who were at once able and fortunate. But sometimes the disadvantage was thoroughly overcome. Sometimes it served no other end than to draw to one point the attention and the efforts of a determined will ; and that matter, in regard to which nature seemed to have said that a man should fall short, became the thing in which he attained unrivalled perfection.

A heavy drag-weight upon the powers of some

men, is the uncertainty of their powers. The man has not his powers at command. His mind is a capricious thing, that works when it pleases, and will not work except when it pleases. I am not thinking now of what to many is a sad disadvantage ; that nervous trepidation which cannot be reasoned away, and which often deprives them of the full use of their mental abilities just when they are most needed. It is a vast thing in a man's favour that, whatever he can do, he should be able to do at any time, and to do at once. For want of coolness of mind, and that readiness which generally goes with it, many a man cannot do himself justice ; and in a deliberative assembly he may be entirely beaten by some flippant person who has all his money (so to speak) in his pocket, while the other must send to the bank for his. How many people can think next day, or even a few minutes after, of the precise thing they ought to have said, but which would not come at the time ! But very frequently the thing is of no value, unless it come at the time when it is wanted. Coming next day, it is like the offer of a thick fur great-coat on a sweltering day in July. You look at the wrap, and say, Oh if I could but have had you on the December night when I went to London by the limited mail, and was nearly starved to death ! But it seems as if the mind must be, to a certain extent, capricious in its action. Caprice, or what looks like it, appears of necessity to go with complicated machinery,

even material. The more complicated a machine is, the liker it grows to mind, in the matter of uncertainty and apparent caprice of action. The simplest machine—say a pipe for conveying water—will always act in precisely the same way. And two such pipes, if of the same dimensions, and subjected to the same pressure, will always convey the self-same quantities. But go to more advanced machines. Take two clocks, or two locomotive engines ; and though these are made in all respects exactly alike, they will act (I can answer at least for the locomotive engines) quite differently. One locomotive will swallow a vast quantity of water at once ; another must be fed by driblets ; no one can say why. One engine is a *fac-simile* of the other ; yet each has its character and its peculiarities, as truly as a man has. You need to know your engine's temper before driving it, just as much as you need to know that of your horse, or that of your friend. I know, of course, there is a mechanical reason for this seeming caprice, if you could trace the reason. But not one man in a thousand could trace out the reason. And the phenomenon, as it presses itself upon us, really amounts to this : that very complicated machinery appears to have a will of its own ; appears to exercise something of the nature of choice. But there is no machine so capricious as the human mind. The great poet who wrote those beautiful verses, could not do *that* every

day. A good deal more of what he writes is poor enough ; and many days he could not write at all. By long habit the mind may be made capable of being put in harness daily for the humbler task of producing prose ; but you cannot say, when you harness it in the morning, how far or at what rate it will run that day.

Go and see a great organ, of which you have been told. Touch it, and you hear the noble tones at once. The organ can produce them at any time. But go and see a great man ; touch *him* ; that is, get him to begin to talk. You will be much disappointed if you expect, certainly, to hear anything like his book or his poem. A great man is not a man who is always saying great things ; or who is always able to say great things. He is a man who on a few occasions has said great things ; who on the coming of a sufficient occasion may possibly say great things again ; but the staple of his talk is commonplace enough. Here is a point of difference from machinery, with all machinery's apparent caprice. You could not say, as you pointed to a steam-engine, The usual power of that engine is two hundred horses ; but once or twice it has surprised us all by working up to two thousand. No ; the engine is always of nearly the power of two thousand horses, if it ever is. But what we have been supposing as to the engine, is just what many men have done. Poe wrote *The Raven* ; he was working

then up to two thousand horse power. But he wrote abundance of poor stuff, working at about twenty-five. Read straight through the volumes of Wordsworth : and I think you will find traces of the engine having worked at many different powers, varying from twenty-five horses or less, up to two thousand or more. Go and hear a really great preacher when he is preaching in his own church upon a common Sunday ; and possibly you may hear a very ordinary sermon. I have heard Mr. Melvill preach very poorly. You must not expect to find people always at their best. It is a very unusual thing that even the ablest men should be like Burke, who could not talk with an intelligent stranger for five minutes, without convincing the stranger that he had talked for five minutes with a great man. And it is an awful thing when some clever youth is introduced to some local poet who has been told how greatly the clever youth admires him ; and what vast expectations the clever youth has formed of his conversation ; and when the local celebrity makes a desperate effort to talk up to the expectations formed of him. I have witnessed such a scene ; and I can sincerely say that I could not previously have believed that the local celebrity could have made such a fool of himself. He was resolved to show that he deserved his fame ; and to show that the mind which had produced those lovely verses in the county newspaper, could not stoop to commonplace things.

Undue sensitiveness, and a too lowly estimate of their own powers, hang heavily upon some men ; probably upon more men than one would imagine. I believe that many a man whom you would take to be ambitious, pushing, and self-complacent, is ever pressed with a sad conviction of inferiority, and wishes nothing more than quietly to slip through life. It would please and satisfy him if he could but be assured that he is just like other people. You may remember a touch of nature (that is, of some people's nature) in Burns ; you remember the simple exultation of the peasant mother when her daughter gets a sweetheart : she is ' well pleased to see *her* bairn respeckit *like the lave,*' that is, like the other girls round. And undue humility, perhaps even befitting humility, holds back sadly in the race of life. It is recorded that a weaver in a certain village in Scotland, was wont daily to offer a singular petition ; he prayed daily and fervently for a better opinion of himself. Yes, a firm conviction of one's own importance is a great help in life. It gives dignity of bearing ; it does (so to speak) lift the horse over many a fence at which one with a less confident heart would have broken down. But the man who estimates himself and his place humbly and justly, will be ready to shrink aside, and let men of greater impudence and not greater desert step before him. I have often seen, with a sad heart, in the case of working people, that manner,

difficult to describe, which comes of being what we in Scotland sometimes call *sair hadden down*. I have seen the like in educated people too. And not very many will take the trouble to seek out and to draw out the modest merit that keeps itself in the shade. The energetic, successful people of this world are too busy in pushing each for himself, to have time to do *that*. You will find that people with abundant confidence, people who assume a good deal, are not unfrequently taken at their own estimate of themselves. I have seen a Queen's Counsel walk into court, after the case in which he was engaged had been conducted so far by his junior, and conducted as well as mortal could conduct it. But it was easy to see that the complacent air of superior strength with which the Queen's Counsel took the management out of his junior's hands, conveyed to the jury (a common jury) the belief that things were now to be managed in quite different and vastly better style. And have you not known such a thing as that a family, not a whit better, wealthier, or more respectable than all the rest in the little country town or the country parish, do yet by carrying their heads higher (no mortal could say why), gradually elbow themselves into a place of admitted social superiority? Everybody knows exactly what they are, and from what they have sprung; but somehow, by resolute assumption, by a quiet air of being better than their neighbours, they

draw a-head of them, and attain the glorious advantage of one step higher on the delicately graduated social ladder of the district. Now it is manifest that if such people had sense to see their true position, and the absurdity of their pretensions, they would assuredly not have gained that advantage, whatever it may be worth.

But sense and feeling are sometimes burdens in the race of life ; that is, they sometimes hold a man back from grasping material advantages which he might have grasped had he not been prevented by the possession of a certain measure of common sense and right feeling. I doubt not, my friend, that you have acquaintances who can do things which you could not do for your life, and who by doing these things, push their way in life. They ask for what they want, and never let a chance go by them. And though they may meet many rebuffs, they sometimes make a successful venture. Impudence sometimes attains to a pitch of sublimity ; and at that point it has produced a very great impression upon many men. The incapable person who started for a professorship, has sometimes got it. The man who, amid the derision of the county, published his address to the electors, has occasionally got into the House of Commons. The vulgar, half-educated preacher, who without any introduction asked a patron for a vacant living in the Church, has now and then got the living. And however unfit you

326 *Concerning People who*

may be for a place, and however discreditable may have been the means by which you got it, once you have actually held it for two or three years, people come to acquiesce in your holding it. They accept the fact that you are there, just as we accept the fact that any other evil exists in this world, without asking why, except on very special occasions. I believe too, that in the matter of worldly preferment, there is too much fatalism in many good men. They have a vague trust that Providence will do more than it has promised. They are ready to think that if it is God's will that they are to gain such a prize, it will be sure to come their way without their pushing. That is a mistake. Suppose you apply the same reasoning to your dinner. Suppose you sit still in your study and say, 'If I am to have dinner to-day, it will come without effort of mine ; and if I am not to have dinner to-day, it will not come by any effort of mine ; so here I sit still and do nothing.' Is not *that* absurd ? Yet that is what many a wise and good man practically says about the place in life which would suit him, and which would make him happy. Not Turks and Hindoos alone have a tendency to believe in their *Kismet*. It is human to believe in that. And we grasp at every event that seems to favour the belief. The other evening, in the twilight, I passed two respectable-looking women, who seemed like domestic servants ; and I caught one sentence which one said

to the other with great apparent faith. ‘You see,’ she said, ‘if a thing’s to come your way, it’ll no gang by ye!’ It was in a crowded street; but if it had been in my country parish where every one knew me, I should certainly have stopped the women, and told them that though what they said was quite true, I feared they were understanding it wrongly; and that the firm belief we all hold in God’s Providence which reaches to all events, and in His sovereignty which orders all things, should be used to help us to be resigned, after we have done our best and failed; but should never be used as an excuse for not doing our best. When we have set our mind on any honest end, let us seek to compass it by every honest means; and if we fail after having used every honest means, *then* let us fall back on the comfortable belief that things are ordered by the Wisest and Kindest; *then* is the time for the *Fiat Voluntas Tua*.

You would not wish, my friend, to be deprived of common sense and of delicate feeling, even though you could be quite sure that once *that* drag-weight was taken off, you would spring forward to the van, and make such running in the race of life as you never made before. Still, you cannot help looking with a certain interest upon those people who, by the want of these hindering influences, are enabled to do things and say things which you never could. I have sometimes looked with no small curiosity

328 *Concerning People who*

upon the kind of man who will come uninvited, and without warning of his approach, to stay at another man's house : who will stay on, quite comfortable and unmoved, though seeing plainly he is not wanted : who will announce, on arriving, that his visit is to be for three days, and who will then, without further remark, and without invitation of any kind, remain for a month or six weeks : and all the while sit down to dinner every day with a perfectly easy and unembarrassed manner. You and I, my reader, would rather live on much less than sixpence a-day than do all this. We *could not* do it. But some people not merely can do it, but can do it without any appearance of effort. Oh, if the people who are victimized by these horse-leeches of society could but gain a little of the thickness of skin which characterizes the horse-leeches, and bid them be off, and not return again till they are invited ! To the same pachydermatous class belong those individuals who will put all sorts of questions as to the private affairs of other people, but carefully shy off from any similar confidence as to their own affairs : also those individuals who borrow small sums of money and never repay them, but go on borrowing till the small sums amount to a good deal. To the same class may be referred the persons who lay themselves out for saying disagreeable things : the 'candid friends' of Canning : the 'people who speak their mind,' who form such pests of society. To

find fault is to right-feeling men a very painful thing ; but some take to the work with avidity and delight. And while people of cultivation shrink, with a delicate intuition, from saying anything which may give pain or cause uneasiness to others, there are others who are ever painfully treading upon the moral corns of all around them. Sometimes this is done designedly : as by Mr. Snarling, who by long practice has attained the power of hinting and insinuating, in the course of a forenoon call, as many unpleasant things as may germinate into a crop of ill-tempers and worries which shall make the house at which he called uncomfortable all that day. Sometimes it is done unawares, as by Mr. Boor, who, through pure ignorance and coarseness, is always bellowing out things which it is disagreeable to some one, or to several, to hear. Which was it, I wonder, Boor or Snarling, who once reached the dignity of the mitre ; and who, at prayers in his house, uttered this supplication on behalf of a lady visitor who was kneeling beside him : ‘ Bless our friend, Mrs. — : give her a little more common sense ; and teach her to dress a little less like a tragedy queen than she does at present ? ’

But who shall reckon up the countless circumstances which lie like a depressing burden on the energies of men, and make them work at that disadvantage which we have thought of under the figure of *carrying weight in life* ? There are men who

carry weight in a damp, marshy neighbourhood, who, amid bracing mountain air, might have done things which now they will never do. There are men who carry weight in an uncomfortable house : in smoky chimneys : in a study with a dismal look-out : in distance from a railway-station : in ten miles between them and a bookseller's shop. Give another hundred a year of income, and the poor, struggling parson who preaches dull sermons will astonish you by the talent he will exhibit when his mind is freed from the dismal depressing influence of ceaseless scheming to keep the wolf from the door. Let the poor little sick child grow strong and well, and with how much better heart will its father face the work of life. Let the clergyman who preached, in a spiritless enough way, to a handful of uneducated rustics, be placed in a charge where weekly he has to address a large cultivated congregation ; and with the new stimulus, latent powers may manifest themselves which no one fancied he possessed, and he may prove quite an eloquent and attractive preacher. A dull, quiet man, whom you esteemed as a blockhead, may suddenly be valued very differently when circumstances unexpectedly call out the solid qualities he possesses, unsuspected before. A man, devoid of brilliancy, may on occasion show that he possesses great good sense ; or that he has the power of sticking to his task, in spite of discouragement. Let a man be placed where dogged-

perseverance will stand him in stead, and you may see what he can do when he has but a chance. The especial weight which has held some men back—the thing which kept them from doing great things and attaining gréat fame—has been just this: that they were not able to say or to write what they have thought and felt. And indeed a great poet is nothing more than the one man in a million who has the gift to express that which has been in the mind and heart of multitudes. If even the most commonplace of human beings could write all the poetry he has felt, he would produce something that would go straight to the hearts of many.

It is touching to witness the indications and vestiges of sweet and admirable things which have been subjected to a weight which has entirely crushed them down: things which would have come out into beauty and excellence if they had been allowed a chance. You may witness one of the saddest of all the losses of nature in various old maids. What kind hearts are there running to waste! What pure and gentle affections blossom to be blighted! I dare say you have heard a young lady of more than forty sing; and you have seen her eyes fill with tears at the pathos of a very commonplace verse. Have you not thought that there was the indication of a tender heart which might have made some good man happy; and, in doing so, made herself happy too? But it was not to be. Still, it is

332 *Concerning Weight in Life.*

sad to think that sometimes upon cats and dogs there should be wasted the affection of a kindly human being ! And you know, too, how often the fairest promise of human excellence is never suffered to come to fruit. You must look upon gravestones to find the names of those who promised to be the best and noblest specimens of the race. They died in early youth ; perhaps in early childhood. Their pleasant faces, their singular words and ways, remain, not often talked of, in the memories of subdued parents, or of brothers and sisters now grown old, but never forgetting how *that* one of the family that was as the flower of the flock was the first to fade. It has been a proverbial saying, you know, even from heathen ages, that those whom the gods love die young. It is but an inferior order of human beings that makes the living succession to carry on the human race.

CHAPTER X.

COLLEGE LIFE AT GLASGOW.

IN the last days of October, just when winter is fairly settling down upon smoky and noisy Glasgow ; when every leaf has gone (for the leaves go early) from the trees near it, and when fogs shorten the day at its beginning and its end ; there begins to appear, intermingled with the crowd in the Trongate, and staring in at the shop-windows of Buchanan-street with a curiosity fresh from the country, a host of lads, varying in age from decided boyhood to decided manhood, conspicuous by the scarlet mantle they wear. Those glaring robes have not been seen before since May-day—for the vacation at Glasgow College lasts from the first of May to about the twenty-sixth of October :—and now their appearance announces to the citizens that winter has decidedly set in ; the season, in Glasgow, of ceaseless rain, fog, and smoke ; of eager business, splendid hospitality, and laborious study. Through the close stifling *wynds* or alleys

334 *College Life at Glasgow.*

of the High-street the word runs, that 'The Colley douds have come back again;' and by the time that November is a few days old, the college courts, which through the summer months lay still and deserted, are thronged with a motley crowd of many hundreds of young men, students of arts, theology, medicine, and law.

The stranger in Glasgow who has paid a visit to the noble cathedral, has probably, in returning from it, walked down the High-street, a steep and filthy way of tall houses, now abandoned to the poorest classes of the community, where dirty women in *mutches*, each followed by two or three squalid children, hold loud conversations all day long; and the alleys leading from which pour forth a flood of poverty, disease, and crime. On the left hand of the High-street, where it becomes a shade more respectable, a dark, low-browed building, of three stories in height, fronts the street for two or three hundred yards. *That* is Glasgow College, or the University of Glasgow: for here, as also at Edinburgh, the University consists of a single College. The first gateway at which we arrive opens into a dull-looking court, inhabited by the professors, eight or ten of whom have houses here. Further down, a low archway, which is the main entrance to the building, admits to two or three quadrangles, occupied by the various class rooms. There is something impressive in the sudden transition from one of the most crowded

and noisy streets of the city, to the calm and stillness of the College courts. The first court we enter is a small one, surrounded by buildings of a dark and venerable aspect. An antique staircase of massive stone leads to the Faculty Hall, or Senate-house ; and a spire of considerable height surmounts a vaulted archway leading to the second court. This court is much larger than the one next the street, and with its turrets and winding staircases, narrow windows and high-pitched roofs, would quite come up to our ideas of academic architecture ; but unhappily, some years since one side of this venerable quadrangle was pulled down, and a large building in the Grecian style erected in its place, which, like a pert interloper, contrasts most disagreeably with the remainder of the old monastic pile. Passing out of this court by another vaulted passage, we enter an open square, to the right of which is the University library, and at some little distance an elegant Doric temple, which is greatly admired by those who prefer Grecian to Gothic architecture. This is the Hunterian Museum, and contains a valuable collection of subjects in natural history and anatomy, bequeathed by the eminent surgeon whose name it bears. Beyond this building, the College gardens stretch away to a considerable distance. The ground is undulating—there are many trees, and what was once a pleasant country stream flows through the gardens ; but Glasgow factories and Glasgow smoke

336 *College Life at Glasgow.*

have quite spoiled what must once have been a delightful retreat from the dust and glare of the city. The trees are now quite blackened, the stream (named the Molendinar Burn) became so offensive that it was found necessary to arch it over, and drifts of stifling and noisome smoke trail slowly all day over the College gardens. There are no evergreens nor flowers ; and the students generally prefer to take their 'constitutional' in the purer air of the western outskirts of Glasgow.

Let us suppose that the young student, brought from the country by parent or guardian, has come to town to enter upon his university career. The order in which the classes are taken is as follows : first year, Latin and Greek ; second, Logic and Greek ; third, Moral Philosophy and Mathematics ; fourth, Natural Philosophy. The classes must be attended in this order by those students who intend taking their degree, or going into the Church ; but any person may attend any class upon signing a declaration to the effect that he is not studying for the Church. Practically, the classes are almost invariably attended in the order which has been mentioned, which is called the College *curriculum*. For several days before the classes open, the professors remain in their houses, that students may call upon them to enter their class. Our young friend and his governor call upon the professor whose class is to be entered. They find him seated

in his study, a low-roofed chamber of small dimensions, but abundantly provided with the comforts which beseem a sedentary and studious life. There is the writing-table at which to sit ; by the window, the desk at which to write or read while standing ; there is the cool seat of polished birch, without a trace of cushion ; and the vast easy-chair, where horse-hair and morocco have done their utmost, to receive the weary man of learning in the day's last luxurious hour of leisure. The professor is seated at his table, fresh and hearty from his six months' holiday, brown from his shooting-box in the Highlands, or his ramble over the Continent, or his pretty villa on the beautiful Frith of Clyde. Three or four lads who have come to enter the class, fidget uneasily on their chairs, with awe-struck faces. The professor may perhaps, for his own guidance, make some inquiry as to the previous acquirements of the student, but there is no preliminary test applied to ascertain the student's fitness for entering college. The ceremony of entering the class is completed by paying the professor his fee, which in almost every class is three guineas. In return, the professor gives the student a ticket of admission to the classroom ; on which, at the end of the session, he writes a certificate of the student's having attended his class. The more civilized students take care to have the exact amount of the fee prepared beforehand, which they place on the professor's table, and which he

338 *College Life at Glasgow.*

receives without remark, thus softening the mercantile transaction as much as may be. Others hand their money to the professor, and demand the change in regular shop fashion. It is amusing to remark the demeanour of the different professors in taking their three guineas. Some are dignifiedly unconscious of the sum received, and although a sharp glance may ascertain that the amount is there, no remark is made. Others take up the money, count it over, and pocket it with a bow, saying, 'Thank you, sir ; much obliged to you, sir.'

And what a strange mixed company the thirteen or fourteen hundred students of Glasgow College make up ! Boys of eleven or twelve years old (Thomas Campbell entered at the latter age) ; men with grey hair, up to the age of fifty or sixty ; great stout fellows from the plough ; men in considerable number from the north of Ireland ; lads from counting-houses in town, who wish to improve their minds by a session at the logic class ; English dissenters, long excluded from the Universities of England, who have come down to the enlightened country where a Turk or a Buddhist may graduate if he will ; young men with high scholarship from the best public schools ; and others not knowing a letter of Greek and hardly a word of Latin. Mr. Lockhart (formerly editor of the *Quarterly Review*) says with truth that, 'the greater part of the students attending the Scotch colleges, consist of per-

sons whose situation in life, had they been born in England, must have left them no chance of being able to share the advantages of an academical education.' 'Any young man who can afford to wear a decent coat, and live in a garret upon porridge or herrings, may, if he pleases, come to Edinburgh, and pass through his academical career just as creditably as is required or expected.' And, in consequence of all this, 'the Universities of Scotland educate, in proportion to the size and wealth of the two countries, twenty times a larger number than those of England educate.'*

Let us imagine our student now fairly entered upon his work. In company with three or four hundred of the newest and brightest gowns, he has, no doubt, attended the ceremony of opening the session in the Common Hall, and listened to many good advices from the Principal, who used regularly to beg his youthful auditors to remember they were 'no longer schoolboys;' a request invariably received with loud applause. The bustle of the first start over, the student has fallen into the regular order of his work. The Latin and Greek classes he finds are very much like classes at school, the main difference being that they are attended by larger numbers, and accordingly that each student is but rarely

* *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk.* Vol. i. pp. 187, 192, 198.

called on for examination. When a student is 'called,' he construes five or six lines; the professor then puts a number of questions upon what has been read. Should he fail to answer any question, the professor asks if any one in the same bench can answer it. If no one can, he next names the numbers of the various benches one after another, and the students in each have then an opportunity of making their knowledge and application apparent to their fellow students; by whom, at the end of the session, the class prizes are voted. Lockhart says with justice of the Scotch professors of Latin and Greek, that

The nature of the duties they perform of course reduces them to something quite different from what we (in England) should understand by the name they bear. They are not employed in assisting young men to study, with greater facility or advantage, the poets, the historians, or the philosophers of antiquity; nay, it can scarcely be said, in any proper meaning of the term, that they are employed in teaching the principles of language. They are schoolmasters in the strictest sense of the word; for their time is spent in laying the very lowest part of the foundation on which a superstructure of learning must be reared. A profound and accomplished scholar may at times be found discharging these duties; but most assuredly there is no need either of depth or elegance to enable him to discharge them as well as the occasion requires.

The reiterated complaints of Professor Blackie, of the Greek Chair at Edinburgh, prove what indeed needs no proof to any one acquainted with the Universities of Scotland, that no improvement has taken place in the years since Lockhart thus wrote. Greek

professors are still expected to begin with the alphabet. The truth is, that while things remain as at present, a good energetic teacher from a public school would make a better Latin or Greek professor, than a man of fine scholarship. Fancy Mr. Blackie patiently listening to a dunce blundering through *ὁ ἦ το!* Or think of assigning the task of grounding a ploughman in the inflections of *τυπτω*, to the gentle and refined Mr. Lushington of Glasgow! We do not think that Mr. Tennyson was sketching the characteristics of the right man for such work, when he wrote of Lushington thus:—

And thou art worthy; full of power;
As gentle; liberal-minded, great,
Consistent; wearing all that weight
Of learning lightly like a flower.

It is the old story of ‘cutting blocks with a razor;’ it is like setting the winner of the Derby to pull a dray. And so long as the work remains what it is, we believe it would be better and more cheerfully done by machinery a good deal more rough and ready.

The students attending the Latin class may number about 250; but the class is taught in two separate divisions. The Greek class (which meets in three divisions) has about 300 students; when Sir Daniel Sandford was professor, it sometimes numbered 500. The Logic class has from 150 to 180 students; the Moral Philosophy, 100 to 120; the Natural Philosophy, 70 to 90.

342 *College Life at Glasgow*

It is a curious thing to witness the beginning of a working day at Glasgow College. We must, to do so, rise at six A.M. in a dark winter morning; for if we live in the better part of the town, we have a walk of half-an-hour to get over before the classes meet. Through darkness and sleet we make our way to the College, which we reach, say at twenty minutes past seven A.M. A crowd of students, old and young, wrapped in the red mantles, shivering and sleepy, is pouring in at the low archway already mentioned. The lights shining through the little windows point out the class-rooms which are now to be occupied. At the door of each stands an unshaven servant, in whose vicinity a fragrance as of whisky pervades the air. The servants in former days were always shabby and generally dirty; not unfrequently drunk. They wear no livery of any kind. By long intercourse with many generations of students, they have acquired the power of receiving and returning any amount of 'chaff.' At length a miserable tinkling is heard from the steeple; the students pour into the class-rooms, and arrange themselves in benches, like the pews of a church. A low pulpit is occupied by the professor. The business of the day is commenced by a short prayer. After prayer, a student, placed in a subsidiary pulpit, calls over the names of the students, who severally signify their presence by saying *Adsum*. The work of the class then goes on till the hour is finished. An hour is

the invariable period for which the class remains. The Latin and Greek classes meet at the early hour we have mentioned ; and, strange to say, it is at this unseasonable time that the eloquent Professor of Moral Philosophy lectures. It is a remarkable proof of his power, that he is able to touch and excite such a wretchedly cold and sleepy auditory. The applause which generally attends his lectures, makes the houses nearest his class-room the least desirable in the professors' court. At half-past eight many of the classes are in operation—as the Latin, Greek, Logic, Natural Philosophy, and Theology. Though it is always an effort to be at College at hours so early, still the arrangement soon comes to be liked by both professors and students. By half-past nine the hardest of the day's work is over ; and thus these early morning hours, which otherwise would probably be turned to little account, save the more valuable hours of the morning and afternoon.

Each of the Philosophy classes meets two hours a day. The morning hour is occupied by a lecture ; and an hour later in the day is given to the examination of the students on the lectures they have heard, and to hearing them read essays on the subjects under consideration. Thus Scotch students have the pen in their hand from the very commencement of their course ; and the same system is kept up to the close of even the long course of eight years for the Church. A very large proportion of

young men thus acquire no inconsiderable command of that noble instrument, the English language ; which is very seldom written with ease and accuracy, except as the result of long-continued practice. The lectures read are *verbatim* the same, session after session, so that a Scotch Professor of Philosophy, with his two hours a day of work, and his six months' holiday in the pleasantest part of the year, has (once his course of lectures is written) a very comfortable place of it.

The present Professor of Latin (or *Humanity*, as it is called) is Mr. Ramsay, a graduate of Cambridge, and the author of the work on 'Roman Antiquities' in the *Encyclopædia Metropolitana*. Mr. Lushington is the Professor of Greek, having succeeded Sir Daniel Sandford in 1838. He was the first Grecian of his time at Cambridge. The Chair of Logic has been filled by Mr. Buchanan for many years. There is no more admirable teacher in the University. Many a young man has dated his intellectual birth to the period of his attendance on the Logic class at Glasgow. Mr. Buchanan is a clergyman of the Scotch church, but resigned his parish on his appointment to the chair. Dr. Fleming is the Professor of Moral Philosophy : he, too, was a parish clergyman before his appointment. He is a man of vast information in every department of metaphysical philosophy, and is, perhaps, not surpassed in a somewhat tawdry eloquence by any

man in Scotland. He is a heavy-looking man when in repose, but when animated, brightens up wonderfully. The intensity with which he himself feels, gives him a great power in moving the feelings of his hearers. Mr. Thomson, a few years since second Wrangler and first Smith's Prizeman, is the Professor of Natural Philosophy. He took a leading part in the laying of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable.

At the end of three years, students may take the degree of Bachelor of Arts, on passing an examination in Classics, Logic, and Moral Philosophy. At the end of four years, on passing a further examination in Mathematics and Natural Philosophy, they may take their Master's degree. Few students comparatively graduate. It is not necessary in order to enter the Church ; and not many young men are willing to undertake no inconsiderable amount of study to attain an honour which, in Scotland, brings with it no advantage whatever. And even the small fee, of from three to five guineas, which is paid at graduation, is a serious consideration to most Scotch students. A university education in Scotland comes far down in the social scale ; and while at the universities of England the great majority of the young men are the sons of gentlemen, in Scotland the vast preponderance consists of sons of farmers, tradesmen, and working men ; and of poor lads, without relations or friends, struggling on amid unheard-of

346 *College Life at Glasgow.*

difficulties and privations. No one can look round the benches of any class-room in Scotland, without being struck by the harsh features and coarse attire of most of the young men; no one can converse with nine out of ten of them, without being struck by their vulgar accent and manner. A writer in the *Quarterly Review* perhaps speaks somewhat severely when he alludes to 'those tag-rag and bob-tail concerns, the Scotch Universities;' but there is truth in Lockhart's remark, that—

A person whose eyes had been accustomed only to such places as the schools of Oxford, would certainly be very much struck with the *primâ facie* mean condition of the majority of the students assembled at the prælections of these Edinburgh [and Glasgow] professors. Here and there one sees some small scattered remnant of the great flock of dandies trying to keep each other in countenance, in a corner of the class-room; but these only heighten, by the contrast of their presence, the general effect of the slovenly and dirty mass which on every side surrounds them with its contaminating atmosphere. *

Yet ability is given by nature with little regard to social position: many of those rough specimens of humanity possess no ordinary talent; many will take on polish wonderfully, before they pass from college to life: and there is really a deep pathos in the story of toil, privation, and resolution, which is the story of many a Glasgow student's college days.

There are, of course, young men of good families at Glasgow College. There are students who wear all-round collars of extreme stiffness, who walk down

* *Peter's Letters.* Vol. i. p. 187.

to their classes from the aristocratic districts of Blythswood-square and Woodside-terrace ; who are in much request at evening parties, and who strut in the afternoon in the Sauchyhall-road, the fashionable promenade of Glasgow. But most of the students live in very plain lodgings, in various parts of the town, and know no more of Glasgow society than if they were living in the Sandwich Islands. There are some streets near the college, consisting of tall houses divided into *flats*, in which great numbers of students dwell. The life of almost all is one of struggle and self-denial. It touches us, and that deeply, to think of poor lads of eighteen or nineteen, toiling on with their studies, with many a thought as to how they are to get food and raiment ; with all those cares upon their heads which are heavy enough, God knows, when they press upon maturer years, yet supported by the hope that at some time in the distant future they may get into the church at last, or even into a parish school. What a princely dwelling must a country manse seem to such ; what an inexhaustible revenue a living of three or four hundred a year ! We have been told that many students have managed to live upon fifteen or twenty pounds a year. After writing this, we were almost startled on recurring to it ; but Mr. Lockhart, a Glasgow student himself, and the son of a Glasgow minister, confirms us : ‘ I am assured,’ he says, ‘ that the great majority of students here have seldom

348 *College Life at Glasgow.*

more than thirty or forty pounds per annum, and that *very many most respectable students contrive to do with little more than half so much money.** Our readers may perhaps remember the touching fact recorded in the Life of Dr. Adam, the very eminent Rector of the High School of Edinburgh — that when at College, his dinner consisted of a penny roll; and that to save the expense of a fire, he was accustomed to eat it as he climbed some long and lonely stair in the Old Town, where there are houses of fourteen stories in height.† We have heard of students from Ireland who brought with them a bag of *scones*, or cakes of oatmeal, on which *alone* they lived in some poor garret. And many a poor family is pinching itself at home, to keep the clever son at College. A clergyman of the Church of Scotland who published a work on *Clerical Economics* dedicated it ‘To a father who, on a hundred pounds a year, brought up six sons to learned professions, and who has often sent his last shilling to each of them in their turn, when they were at College.’ The motto which Sydney Smith proposed for the *Edinburgh Review*, ‘*Tenui musam meditamur avena,*’ — ‘We cultivate literature on a little oatmeal,’ might be the motto of many a Glasgow student. A few years since, a poor fellow, whose education

* *Peter's Letters*. Vol. i. p. 193.

† ‘Life of Dr. Adam,’ in Chambers’ *Scottish Biographical Dictionary*.

was so deficient that he could not earn anything by teaching others, supported himself by becoming a night-watchman, and studied his Greek Testament by the light of the street lamps. The Census of 1851 in Glasgow was in a great degree taken up by students, thankful thus to make a few shillings. We cannot refrain from making a quotation which tells a story which, to our personal knowledge is true in scores of cases,—ay, in hundreds :—

My father was a poor man—a common working wright, in a little village not far from Glasgow. My mother and he pinched themselves blue to give me my education. I went to college when I was about fifteen years old, and they sent me in cheese and vegetables, even oatmeal to make my porridge, every week by the carrier. I did not taste butcher's meat three times, I believe, in the first three years I was a student. But then I began to do something for myself. I got a little private teaching, and by degrees ceased to be a burden on the old people. Step by step I wrought on, till I became tutor in a gentleman's family. Then I was licensed, and I remained a preacher for twenty years—sometimes living in a family, sometimes teaching from house to house, and latterly I had a school of my own in Glasgow. I was forty years old and upwards ere I got the kirk, Mr. Wald; and my dear parents never lived to see me in it.*

Not less true and not less touching is another passage from the same masterly pen :—

If I was poor, I had no objections to living poorly. After attending classes and hospitals from daybreak to sunset, I contented myself with a dinner and supper in one, of bread and milk—or perhaps a mess of potatoes, with salt for their only sauce. A deal table, a half-broken chair, and a straw pallet, were all the furniture I had about me; and very rarely did I indulge myself with a fire. But I could

* *History of Matthew Wald*, pp. 148-9.

350 *College Life at Glasgow.*

wrap a blanket over my legs, trim my lamp, and plunge into the world of books, and forget everything.*

There is not a whit of exaggeration in Sir Walter Scott's description of the early struggles of Dominie Sampson. And we confess we cannot read without emotion the description in *Matthew Wald*, of the poor tutor, going for his evening's work with his pupils, to the house of some wealthy burgess, and being saluted in his lobby 'with the amiable fragrance of soup, roast meat, rum-punch, and the like dainties,' himself just from his spare mess of potatoes and salt. Ah, there is much pathos about the daily life of the poor students of Glasgow! Let no one indulge in the heartless sneer at the poor fellow's threadbare coat, his whity-brown paper, his linen so coarse that it looks like sail-cloth, his patched boots, and his worn anxious face. God bless him, and help him, say we! Speak kindly to him, dandified young student; deal gently with him, grave professor; his heart is very likely so full already that it will almost break with one drop more. He is the hope and pride, and the anxious care, too, of some poor family far away, whose members are grinding themselves down to life's last necessities to give him advantages which (sad that in the nature of things it must be) will, when obtained, draw a line of separation between him and them-

* *Matthew Wald*, pp. 203 5.

selves. They will make him, perhaps, the scholar and the gentleman, but all this will only serve to introduce him into a world of which they know nothing. They may be proud of him still, when he gets a kirk at last; but he will perhaps marry a lady, and then they will hardly ever see him, and it will be with a vague, blank feeling of disappointment when they do. And the old parents—it may be, left alone in the last days of life, with the single return for years of struggle, that they can say that the son whom they hardly ever see, is a parish minister a hundred miles off—may think that, after all, it might have been better had he saved his home-bred virtues in his parents' lowly cot, and by his daily presence smoothed his parents' passage to their lowly graves.

It is sad to think that not unfrequently all this effort and self-denial on the part of the family at home, and the student at college, are found in the case of poor fellows who are so completely deficient in ability, that it is impossible that they should ever get on in life. The Divinity Hall of each University is never without a sprinkling of lads who would have made excellent ploughmen, or schoolmasters, or mechanics, but whose whole future life must be blasted by the unfortunate fact that nothing would serve themselves or their relations but that they must try to get into the Church. We have known of poor deformed creatures who toiled and starved

on year after year, hoping, with a despairing earnestness that in some cases settled down into monomania, that they might yet pass the Presbytery, and be presented to a living. It is a very painful duty which the Presbyteries have sometimes to perform, in rejecting applicants for orders who are manifestly unfit, yet whose rejection crushes the cherished hopes and foils the utmost endeavours of a poor family for many years. We believe that such a case has been as that such a person has come up for examination five or six successive times at intervals of a year or two, before abandoning the hope of passing. We have heard of a case in which a grown-up man, on being told by the Moderator or President of the Presbytery that he 'was recommended still further to prosecute his studies,' the mild formula by which rejection is conveyed, dropped senseless on the floor of the court, and lay for long as dead. We know of a case in which a person, in like manner rejected, had to be conveyed to a place of restraint, a wild raving maniac. The dogged energy and determination of the Scottish character can bear a man through almost anything so long as hope remains; but when the last hope breaks down, we believe that the firm Scottish heart may be roused to a frenzy of despair as keen as ever stirred in the hot blood of the tropics.

Those students who are poor and who possess fair scholarship, very generally maintain themselves

by private teaching. They instruct lads in the junior classes, hastening from house to house in the evenings, and usually remaining one hour with each pupil. The fee for such attendance is a guinea a month. We find it mentioned in the *Life of James Halley*, one of the most distinguished of Glasgow students in recent years, that during the period in which he made his reputation, 'his principal source of maintenance was the product of his own exertion as a private tutor. A very considerable portion of his time—always four, and sometimes five, hours a day—was taken up in this way. This very materially enhances his merit in maintaining so high a position in all the classes.'* Campbell the poet, writing of a period when he was just eighteen years old, records that 'after my return from Mull, I supported myself during the winter by private tuition.'† We have known of students who made a respectable figure in their classes, who were engaged in teaching for six, eight, or ten hours a day. There are a great many exhibitions, or *Bursaries*, as they are called, which are intended to aid deserving students. These vary in amount from three or four pounds a year up to forty. But, unhappily, hardly any of them are open to competition, and they are very

* *Memoir of James Halley, B.A., Student of Theology*, p. 17. Edinburgh. 1842.

† *Life*, prefixed to *Poems*. Edition of 1851; p. 28.

354 *College Life at Glasgow.*

frequently given to those students who least need them and least deserve them.

On the whole, looking at the way in which Glasgow students generally *do* live, and the way in which they *may* live, we must admit that it was not without reason that the old Glasgow merchant in *Cyril Thornton* boasted of the accessibility of a Scotch University education :—

So ye've come down here to be a colleaginer. It's a lang gait to gang for learning. But after a', I am no sure that you could ha'e done better. Our colleges here are no bund down like yours in the south, by a wheen auld and fizzionless rules, and we dinna say to ilka student, either bring three hundred pounds in your pouch, or gang about your business. We dinna lock the door o' learning, as they do at Oxford and Cambridge, and shut out a' that canna bring a gouden key in their hand, but keep it on the sneck, that onybody that likes may open it.

At the end of the four years' course in Arts, students for the Church begin their theological studies, which extend over four years more. On 'entering the Divinity Hall,' as it is termed, the student lays aside the red gown, and for the remainder of his college course wears no distinguishing dress. During each of these four sessions he attends the lectures of the Professor of Theology, and the lectures of the Professors of Hebrew and Church History for two sessions each. The Professor of Theology is necessarily a clergyman, and is, *ex officio*, a member of the Presbytery of Glasgow.

* *Youth and Manhood of Cyril Thornton.* Vol. i. p. 60.

Laymen are eligible for the Chairs of Hebrew and Church History ; but in practice they are always filled by clergymen. Dr. Hill is the Professor of Theology ; Mr. Weir, a young clergyman, has lately succeeded to the Chair of Hebrew ; and that of Church History is filled by Dr. Jackson, an able man, whose besetting sin is a tendency to become most abstrusely metaphysical in his lectures. The Hebrew class is taught very much as the Latin and Greek classes are ; the Theology and Church History, like the Philosophy classes. The number of students attending the Divinity Hall is, we believe, above a hundred. The vacancies in the Church caused by death average about thirty-five annually, and Glasgow College alone could supply nearly that number of candidates for orders. The University of Edinburgh turns out yearly almost as many ; the Universities of St. Andrew's and Aberdeen as many more. Our readers may suppose that there is a pretty sharp competition for every living that becomes vacant, while the supply is thus nearly three-fold in excess of the demand.

After the student for the Church has completed his college course, he applies for orders to the Presbytery within whose bounds he resides. He is 'taken on trials' by that Church-court. He is examined in all the branches he has studied at college, and is required to compose and read to the Presbytery five or six discourses. These 'trials'

356 *College Life at Glasgow.*

occupy perhaps six months, at the end of which time he is licensed to preach. He is not permitted to administer the sacraments until he has been ordained ; and in practice no one is ever ordained till he has been appointed to a church as minister. It will thus be seen that nearly nine years pass from the time a student enters college, down to the period at which he is licensed to preach. If licensed at the age of twenty-two, as is not unfrequently the case, having left off his classical studies six or seven years before, it may be left to our readers to imagine how much claim he can have to be regarded as a *scholar*, in the English sense. We think that reform in the Scotch University system is imperatively needed, and in no respect more imperatively than in the abbreviation of the enormous course for the Church. To finish that course in anything like reasonable time, the student must enter college at an absurdly early age.

The competition for academic honours is as keen at Glasgow as it can be anywhere. The prizes for general eminence in each class are voted by the students in it, at the end of the session. The prizes are almost always given with perfect fairness ; so the system is better in practice than it looks in theory. When ten or twelve prizes are given in a class, it may be supposed that the degrees of merit are less strongly marked among the lowest on the list of prizemen, and private feeling may weigh in the adjudication of

the inferior prizes. But there is hardly an instance on record of the first, second, or third prize going otherwise than as the professor would have awarded it. The first prize in each class is of course a matter of special ambition; it has often been contested with an eagerness prejudicial to health and even life. We have known of Glasgow students who for five months of the session, have allowed themselves not more than three or four hours of sleep nightly, the entire waking day being devoted to study. In such cases the feverish anxiety of the competition has sometimes kept up the student in working trim to the end of the session, while at its close, the stimulus removed, he has utterly broken down. The higher Latin and Greek prizes are keenly contested, as success in obtaining any of them marks out a student for appointment to one of the *Snell Exhibitions*. Under the Snell endowment, the University of Glasgow sends ten students to Balliol College, Oxford, giving to four of them a stipend of 135*l.* a year each, and to the remaining six 120*l.* a year each. These exhibitions are tenable for ten years. And for the credit of the University, the professors generally send to Oxford the best classical students who are willing to go. Classical learning, however, is undervalued in Scotland, and the principal honours of the University go for proficiency in Mental Philosophy, in its various departments. For students who propose completing their

358 *College Life at Glasgow.*

course in Scotland, the testing classes are those of Logic and Moral Philosophy—Moral Philosophy implying at Glasgow a complete course of Metaphysics. Whoever obtains the first prize in that class, is pretty safe to carry the honours of the Divinity classes. The work of these classes demands the same kind of ability; and, with the exception of importations from other universities, which are rarely of first-class students, the competition in these classes will be with the same men.

Among the most coveted distinctions of the University are the prizes for the 'University Essays.' These prizes are eight or nine in number annually, and the competition for them is extensive. Two gold medals, given on alternate years, are open to the competition of all students attending any class in the University; one of these is given for an essay in history, the other for an essay in political economy. Then there are one or two prizes open to the competition of all students of theology; two or three to all students of philosophy; one to all students of medicine. The following, from the published prize-list, will give an idea of the kind of subjects prescribed.

In 1842, the Gartmore gold medal was given for the best essay on 'The Expediency or Inexpediency of Capital Punishments.' In 1844, for the best essay on 'Secondary Punishments.' In 1848, for the best essay on 'Under what Circumstances, and

in what Mode, should a Constitutional State encourage Emigration?' In 1843, the Ewing gold medal was given for the best account of 'The Circumstances which led to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, with the Results of that Treaty.' In 1845, the subject was, 'An Account of the First Partition of Poland in 1772.' In 1847, 'An Account of the Establishment and Progress of the British Empire in India, to the termination of the Government of Warren Hastings.' Among the subjects to be written on in different years by students of Philosophy, we find 'An Analysis of the Faculty of Judging;' 'Poetic Diction, its Use and Abuse by the Orators;' 'The Nature and Influence of Motives in Moral Action;' 'The Historical Episode and its Conditions, Critically Considered, Illustrated by Examples;' 'A Classification and Analysis of the Passions.' Among the subjects for students of Theology, we have, 'The Analogy of the Mosaic and Christian Dispensations;' 'The Extent of the Atonement of Christ;' 'Baptismal Regeneration;' 'Apostolical Succession;' 'Auricular Confession.' And in Physics, 'The Principles and Practicability of Atmospheric Railways;' 'The Form and Construction of Arches;' 'The Methods of Supplying Large Towns with Water.'

These essays are very laboriously written. They are often complete works on the subjects proposed, extending to some hundreds of pages, and the result

360 *College Life at Glasgow.*

of original research and protracted thought. We have reason to know that the prize essays written by one very successful student in one year extended to nearly two thousand pages. There are generally two or three of the University essay prizes open to the competition of each student each year; and besides the prizes for general eminence voted by the students, there is usually, in each class, a prize for an essay, which is adjudicated by the professor. A student of extraordinary energy may thus compete for five or six essay prizes in one session. Sometimes a man who has carried all the honours which belong to his own department, makes an excursion into another field, to find a fresh subject and new competitors. An amusing instance of this is recorded in the *Life of Halley*:—

In the summer of 1834 he enrolled as a student in the botanical class. This was done chiefly with a view to benefit his health. The garden in which the lecture-room was situated lay at a distance of about two miles from his place of residence, and the hour of lecture was from eight to nine in the morning. This secured for three months a system of early and regular exercise. It happened that during that session a gentleman, whose name was not given, empowered Dr. (now Sir William) Hooker to offer a gold medal for the best essay on 'The Natural History and Uses of the Potato.'

Halley had not paid much attention to the study of botany, and the prescribed subject of the essay did not at all lie in his way, yet he determined to write by way of amusement, and, as he said, 'to beat the medicals.' The result was a treatise of 172 closely written quarto pages. It was pronounced the best; and the interloper carried off the medal, fairly won from the medical students on their own proper field.

Whether this achievement had found its way into the *Farmer's Magazine*, we cannot tell, but it had nearly procured for him a repu-

tation of which he was not desirous. One day a stranger was ushered into his room, announcing himself as an Irish agriculturist, who had devoted considerable attention to the failure of the potato crop. Having heard that Mr. Halley had been studying the same subject, he had waited upon him to hear the result of his researches. Mr. Halley received his visitor with due politeness and gravity; laid aside his folios, and entered, with all becoming solemnity, into the comparative merits of late and early planting—of whole sets and single eyes, and after a long consultation dismissed his visitor, highly delighted with the interview.*

The subjects of the University prize essays are announced on the first of May in each year; the essays are taken into the Principal's house in December following. Each essay bears two mottoes, and is accompanied by a sealed letter bearing the same mottoes, and containing the name of the author, with a declaration that the essay is of his unaided composition. The successful essay is announced at the distribution of prizes in the Common Hall on the first of May, and the letter containing the author's name is opened in the presence of the assembled *Comitia*. The other letters are destroyed unopened. The prize essay is placed in the library, where, however, it is accessible only to the professors. A proof how fairly the students vote the highest prizes, is furnished by the fact that these prizes for essays, adjudicated by the professors in utter ignorance of their authorship, are given in nineteen cases out of twenty to students who have 'taken' (such is the college phrase) the first prize in their

* *Halley's Life*, pp. 23-24

362 *College Life at Glasgow.*

respective classes by the students' votes. We have examined the prize-list for a number of years, and we find that the honours awarded by students and professors almost invariably fall to the same men

The distribution of prizes on May-day is a gay scene. Students and professors alike are in high spirits in the anticipation of their holiday time. Tickets of admission to the ceremony are in great request. Our readers may perhaps remember that the first poetical composition of the author of the *Pleasures of Hope*, was *A Description of the Distribution of Prizes in the Common Hall of the University of Glasgow, on the 1st of May, 1793*. All old Glasgow students have many pleasant associations with this day of the year.

The first of May is the day fixed by immemorial usage in the University for the distribution of the prizes, a day looked forward to with 'hopes, and fears that kindle hope,' by many youthful and ardent spirits. The Great Hall of the college on that day certainly presents a very pleasing and animated spectacle. The academical distinctions are bestowed with much of ceremonial pomp, in the presence of a vast concourse of spectators, and it is not uninteresting to mark the flush of bashful triumph on the cheek of the victor; the sparkling of his downcast eye as the hall is rent with loud applause, when he advances to receive the badge of honour assigned him by the voice of his fellow-students. It is altogether a sight to stir the spirit in the youthful bosom, and stimulate into healthy action faculties which, but for such excitement, might have continued in unbroken slumber.*

The Common Hall is a plain square apartment with a gallery at each end. It is capable of con-

* Cyril Thornton. Vol. i. pp. 215, 216.

taining about a thousand persons. Along one side runs a raised bench, occupied by the professors. The Principal presides at the distribution, unless when the Lord Rector is present. Long before the appointed hour, which is always ten A.M., the body of the hall is thronged with students, and the galleries with ladies. The students beguile the time by throwing volleys of peas at one another; after a distribution, several bushels are gathered up from the floor. There is a prescriptive toleration for peas, but no other missile is permitted; and a strong-minded man who introduced eggs, narrowly escaped expulsion. The bald heads of some of the servants present tempting marks, and are furiously assailed. At length the professors (all of whom wear gowns) enter in procession, preceded by the *bedellus*, bearing a huge mace of silver. A prayer in Latin is offered by the Principal. Then the University prize essays are announced; the letters containing the authors' names are opened, and the prizes are delivered to the successful students by the Lord Rector or Principal. The divinity prizes are given next; then the medical, then the philosophy and classical. The proceedings are over about one o'clock; and ere the sun has set, the last red gown, now sadly faded from its November brightness, has disappeared from the streets of Glasgow. The students are scattered over the country; tutors in gentlemen's families, teaching parish schools, acting as missionaries or

364 *College Life at Glasgow.*

catechists under the clergy of large towns, watching sheep, busy at farm-work, and some of the more distinguished, by the time a week has passed, busy collecting materials for next year's University essays.

The names of the students stand in the class catalogue *in Latin*; and the professor, in addressing a student, uses his latinized Christian name in the vocative. There is no such thing known in Scotland as that entire sinking of the Christian name which is usual in the public schools of England. At one period the professors at Glasgow always addressed their students in the Latin language. The impression produced on a stranger was decidedly that of the ridiculous. Mr. Lockhart tells us that when he went to the class-room of Mr. Young, the very eminent Greek Professor at Glasgow, forty years since, the first thing done was calling over the roll of the class, which was done by one of the students :—

The professor was quite silent during this space, unless where some tall, awkward Irishman, or young indigenous blunderer happened to make his *entrée* in a manner more noisy than suited the place, on which occasion a sharp cutting voice from the chair was sure to thrill in their ears some brief but decisive query, or command, or rebuke ; — '*Quid agas tu, in isto angulo, pedibus strepitans et garriens !*' '*Cave tu tibi, Dugalde M^o Quhirter, et tuas res agas !*' '*Notetur, Phelimius O'Shaughnessy, sero ingrediens, ut solvat duas asses sterlinenses !*' '*Iterumne admonendus es, Nicolaei Jarvie ?*' '*Quid hoc rei, Francisce Warper ?*' &c. &c.

The custom of the Professor addressing the class in Latin has now almost entirely disappeared. The

last vestiges of it linger in the Philosophy classrooms, in such beautifully classical sentences as ‘Silentium, gentlemen, silentium!’ ‘Nigellius M^cLamroch is breaking silentium!’ The fact is, the custom was found to be a very inconvenient one at once to professors and students. It is not too much to say that most of the latter understood English very much better than Latin, and few of the professors had such a command of Latin as to be able to express themselves in it correctly when they got angry. It is a tradition in Glasgow College that a professor, who died some years since, once commanded a noisy student to be still. The lad replied that he had been perfectly so. The professor’s indignation at this mis-statement was too much for his Latinity. He burst out, ‘*Nonne video te jumpantem over the table!*’

The University library is a very good one. We believe that in Scotland it ranks second only to the Advocates’ library in Edinburgh. It was founded in the fifteenth century. We understand that the Senate can afford to expend on the purchase of new books about 1000*l.* a year. Of this sum the Treasury pays 700*l.* annually as compensation for the loss of the Stationers’ Hall privilege. Each student has likewise to pay seven shillings annually to the library, and in return has the privilege of having two volumes at a time during the session at his own home, and of consulting as many as he pleases in the

366 *College Life at Glasgow.*

reading-room. 'No novels, romances, tales, nor plays,' are lent to the students. These, however, pour into the library in great profusion for the use of the wives and daughters of the professors.

At one time, degrees in Arts were granted after a merely formal examination. The examination is now a real one, so far as it extends. It may interest some of our readers to know its extent. For the ordinary degree of Bachelor of Arts, the subjects of examination are as follows : —

In Latin : Livy, Three Books ; Virgil, *Æneid*, Three Books ; Horace, Odes, Three Books.

In Greek : the Four Gospels ; Homer, Three Books.

In Logic : The Intellectual Powers ; the Ancient or Aristotelian Logic ; the Modern or Inductive Logic.

In Moral Philosophy : The Intellectual, Active and Moral Powers ; the Will ; Practical Ethics ; Natural Theology.

To obtain the degree of M.A., the student must further be examined—

In Natural Philosophy : The subjects lectured on in the class.

In Mathematics : Euclid, first Six Books ; Plane Trigonometry ; Simple and Quadratic Equations.

For the degrees with honours, the examinations are much more severe.

The examinations for degrees are held on the Thursdays in March and April. With very little exception, they are conducted *vivâ voce*. The statute requires that they should take place in the presence of at least two professors, but in practice the candidate for a degree is examined in each branch by the professor under whom he has studied it, the other professor present not interfering in the examination, nor even attending to it. A strong effort has been made of late years to raise the standard of attainment required in graduates ; and sometimes as many as one-third of the students who go up for examination are plucked. In the good old times no one was ever rejected ; to ask for a degree, and to get it, were convertible terms. We have already stated that very many students take no degree ; no advantage is derived in after-life from having taken one. It is not required of men entering the Church, that they should have one. And in the case of the ordinary run of young men, whose desire is to get through their '*curriculum*' with as little trouble as possible, it is hardly to be expected that some toil and some anxiety will be endured, with no inducement of countervailing advantage. Still (counting both Bachelors and Masters), some sixty or seventy students take their degree in each year ; and among the graduates, we may say, are all students of any eminence who have advanced so far in their course as to have it in their power to go up.

368 *College Life at Glasgow.*

The degree in honours is very seldom sought, even by the most distinguished, except under the stimulus of an occasional prize. In order to go up for such a degree with the least hope of success, a man must spend on his preparations an amount of labour which would yield a better return if given to class-work or the composition of prize essays. College distinction in Scotland, though so eagerly sought, does not aid a man in after-life as it does in England. Even in the Church it goes for very little. It may lead to a good deal being expected of a young preacher at his first outset : but it is his popularity with ordinary congregations that determines his success, unless where patronage is administered with a higher hand than it has been of late years in Scotland ; and very great dunces indeed are often endowed by nature with very loud voices, and are quite competent to practise a howling and sudorific oratory, which goes down amazingly with the least intelligent of the Scottish peasantry.

A marked feature of Glasgow college life is what is termed the *Blackstone Examination*. The name is derived from an antique chair of oak, with a seat of black marble, which is occupied by the student under examination. This examination is compulsory. Before entering the Logic class, the students are examined on the Blackstone in Greek. Before entering the Moral Philosophy, in Logic ; and before entering the Natural Philosophy, in Moral

Philosophy. This examination is a mere form : no one is ever turned at it. It is amusing to witness the odd mixture of Latin and English in which, on this occasion, communication is held between the student and the professor. The latter is seated in a large chair at one side of the table ; on the other side stands the formidable Blackstone ; a great crowd of students fills the examination-room. ‘Carole Dickie,’ says the professor. Carolus, pale and trembling, walks up to the table. ‘Well, Carole,’ says the professor, ‘what do you profess?’ Answer : ‘Doctissime Professor, Evangelium secundum Joannem profiteor.’ Carolus then takes his seat on the Blackstone, and construes a verse or two.

A prize is given yearly to the student who passes the best examination on the Blackstone, in Latin ; also for the best in Greek. This prize is a matter of very keen competition, as success in obtaining it, coming at the commencement of the session, almost ensures a student of the first prize in the class. A very great number of books is often ‘professed’ by competitors for these prizes. There are traditions in the College of students who arrived at the examination-room with a wheel-barrow, containing the works on which they were willing to be examined. The examination is *vivâ voce*, and lasts for several hours. A number of years since, three competitors went in for the Greek Blackstone prize : Tait, Smith, and Halley. Halley made a most brilliant

appearance, and carried off the prize. He studied for the Scotch Church, but died before obtaining licence. Of his competitors, Smith went to Cambridge, where he became Senior Wrangler; Tait succeeded Dr. Arnold as head-master of Rugby, and is now Bishop of London. It cannot be said that any special brilliancy of talent recommended him to that eminent place; but it is generally admitted that he has filled it with great judgment.

The character and conduct of the students of Glasgow are generally unexceptionable. There may be a black sheep now and then, but such cases are very rare. Indeed, no one without considerable moral stamina would ever think of living the life of nine-tenths of the Glasgow students. And 'their lot circumscribes' the errors and follies of which they could by possibility be guilty. They have not the money to indulge the tastes, whether good or bad, of most English University men. Wine-parties, riding-horses, escapades to London, coursing and hunting, even rowing-matches, are beyond the tether of a man to whom every penny is a serious consideration; and who cannot but think of his poor sisters wearing out their eyes at needlework, and his old father denying himself the long-prized solace of a little tobacco, to keep the brother and the son at college. He would be a black-hearted villain who could be vicious or even extravagant, when either extravagance or vice would be sure to frustrate *their*

hopes and break *their* hearts. The grosser vices are, we believe, unknown. An occasional *gaudeamus*, at which whisky-toddy is the chief luxury ; a visit to the theatre, made with fear and trembling ; a row with the police once in eight or ten years ; constitute the utmost dissipation of the mass of Glasgow students. Mr. Lockhart's description of the *morale* at the University of St. Andrew's holds true of Glasgow as well :

I lived a life almost solitary, and in general certainly very simple and innocent. The lads there were mostly poor, and had few means of signalizing themselves by any folly. Our greatest diversion in the way of sport was a game at golf ; and we had little notion of any debauch beyond a pan of toasted cheese, and a bottle or two of the College ale, now and then on a Saturday night.*

The service of the Scotch Church used to be performed on Sundays during the session in the Common Hall, but hardly any one went to it, and a few years since the arrangement was allowed to drop. The students are now permitted to dispose of themselves on Sunday as they please.

We have mentioned that a number of professors have houses in the College. One court is filled entirely with these houses, and a few others are jammed in, in unexpected corners of the class-room courts. They are all quaint, old-fashioned dwellings, with a strong smack of academic repose about them. The apartments are small, and the ceilings very low. The very filthiest lane in Glasgow runs

* *Matthew Wald*, p. 57.

372 *College Life at Glasgow.*

parallel to one side of the quadrangle, at a distance of some twenty yards. During the railway mania, a company obtained an act to remove the College buildings to a pretty situation in the western outskirts of the town, converting the present College and gardens into a terminus. Although the New College was to have been a magnificent piece of Gothic architecture, the general feeling was against the abandonment and desecration of the old walls. But the resident professors and their wives and daughters, long poisoned by the vile odours of the 'Havannah Vennel,' were delighted at the idea of a transference to the pleasant slopes of Kelvin Grove. The railway company, however, went to ruin, and the New College scheme fell to the ground.

Glasgow has by far the best endowed University in Scotland. The professors form a close corporation, and keep their affairs very much to themselves ; so it is only from common report we can speak of the value of the several chairs. But upon that authority, we believe that the Chair of Greek is worth above 1000*l.* a year ; those of Philosophy from 800*l.* to 900*l.* That of Theology, though the premier chair of the University, does not stand first in point of emolument. It is said to be worth about 600*l.* a year. The sums mentioned do not include the value of the residences. Many of the more recently-founded chairs have exceedingly small endowments, and their income is derived mainly

from the fees paid by the students. In all the classes, the professors retain the fees paid them : so that a professor's income may be materially increased should his fame attract a great number of disciples. When Sir D. Sandford was Greek professor, he crowded his class-room not merely with regular students, but with Glasgow clergymen, lawyers, and merchants, who attended his eloquent and enthusiastic prelections. And we have heard it said that in those days the revenue of the Greek chair was above 1500*l.* a year.

Among other little advantages, the professors are free from payment of the local taxes ; they are also supplied with coals and gas. An abundant supply of newspapers and periodicals is provided for themselves and their families. And the fine old 'Fore Hall,' a large apartment, wainscoted with black oak, and by far the most picturesque chamber in the University, is occupied by the professors as a club-room. On the whole, a Glasgow professor on the old foundation leads a very comfortable life.

One or two of the professors are unable to induce any one to attend their lectures. It may therefore be regarded as difficult to explain what purpose these professors serve. Dr. Nichol, the late eloquent Professor of Astronomy, gave occasionally short courses of popular lectures, which were open to all students, and which were well attended. But no class demanding labour and sustained attention will find

374 *College Life at Glasgow.*

students, unless attendance upon it is made compulsory. We think it would be utterly useless to found new chairs in the Scotch Universities, as has lately been proposed. We believe that to do so would be the very reverse of a reform or improvement. Unless attendance upon them is made an essential part of the *curriculum*, no one would attend them. And we believe that to make attendance upon them compulsory would, in the case of many a student who has more than enough to do already, be the last pound that breaks the camel's back. It is in the Latin and Greek classes that reform is needed. Raise the standard of scholarship by an examination at entering College ; give the professors of Latin and Greek *professor's* work to do, not that of hedge schoolmasters ; shorten to half, the preposterously extended course for the Church ; let students enter the University at eighteen or nineteen instead of at twelve or thirteen : they will thus not be hurried through the Philosophy classes while mere children—and the Scotch Universities will have all the reform they need. But on this subject we have not time to enter.

The first fortnight of the session, every alternate year, is taken up with a series of violent disturbances connected with the election of the Lord Rector. We believe that at one time this officer had various duties to perform ; but for many years past his sole function has been to give an address to

the students in the Common Hall upon his inauguration. The Lord Rector is elected by the professors and students. The election goes almost invariably upon political grounds, and is conducted with unparalleled bitterness of party feeling. Although the professors always vote at the election, they profess to leave the management of it in the hands of the students; the leaders of whom, however, are virtually directed in their movements by the professors of their own party. All the arts usual at other contested elections are brought into play, aggravated by the hot-headedness incidental to the youth of the parties engaged. Public meetings are held, and addresses and squibs of all kinds are printed and circulated in immense profusion. The most violent attacks are made by either party upon the leaders of the other, and upon the opposing candidate. Sometimes these attacks end in physical violence. At a meeting in one of the class rooms, a few years ago, the platform was charged by a large force of antagonistic students. It was gallantly defended with cudgel and fist, and more than one of the attacking party was felled like an ox. The air is darkened in the Hall on the election-day by clouds of peas, of which missiles the professors get even more than their share. These dignitaries always behave with great good-humour upon the occasion; and, the *saturnalia* once over, discipline is restored, and all parties return quietly to work.

376 *College Life at Glasgow.*

Among the Lord Rectors of the last thirty years, are, Lord Jeffrey, Sir James Mackintosh, Lord Brougham, Thomas Campbell (who was elected in opposition to Sir Walter Scott), the Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earl of Derby, Sir Robert Peel, Sir James Graham, Earl Russell, Lord Macaulay, the Duke of Argyle, and Sir E. Bulwer Lytton. The inaugural addresses since Jeffrey's time have been published in a large volume. Edmund Burke was Rector in 1783; he fairly broke down in his address, and stopped in the middle of it. Brougham's address is regarded as the most eloquent; Macaulay's was a very fine one. We remember that great man, in a large yellow waistcoat, getting on in a slow sing-song through his address, and drinking a little water at the close of each short paragraph. The Rector wears at his inauguration a very ancient and shabby gown, decorated with faded gold lace. It is never forgot in Glasgow College, that Sir Robert Peel said, on assuming it, that he felt greater pride in putting on that gown, than in putting on the robes of Prime Minister.

This chapter has run to such a length, that we must forego our intention of saying something about the conflicts with the police, few and far between, yet very desperate when they occur; of the occasional breaches of discipline; of traditions of the odd professors of the last generation; of publications written by the students, most of which are remark-

ably poor ; of the extraordinary scenes which are sometimes presented at the breakfast-parties given by the professors in the course of the session. Every Saturday morning in the months of March and April, each professor has fifteen or twenty of his class at breakfast, till he has got through his roll. It would require another pen than ours to depict the sheepishness and timidity of some poor fellows on entering The Presence, their gradually growing confidence, and the jaunty and jocular free-and-easiness which they occasionally attain before the close of the entertainment.

We have thus endeavoured to afford our readers some idea of how things go on in the University of Glasgow : an institution which sends forth from its plain and even tumble-down class-rooms, ‘ a mighty population of men, who have a kind and measure of education which fits them for taking a keen and active management in the affairs of ordinary life ; ’ and whose long course of study many a one has entered on a raw boy, and emerged from comparatively a thoughtful man. We can but very rarely trace the after career of Glasgow students, as we often may trace that of Oxford and Cambridge men, in the history of the senate and the country. A seat on the Scotch Bench is about the highest thing that a Glasgow man can look to, and by far the most eminent among the students of Glasgow pass

378 *College Life at Glasgow.*

into the simple life of a Scotch parish minister. It is quite remarkable to what a degree the Church absorbs the highest talent of the University. And it is a significant fact, that only two Glasgow students—Campbell and Jeffrey—have risen to the dignity of Lord Rector, since the period at which the Rectors began to give Inaugural Addresses.

Yet there are few Glasgow students who do not cherish a fond recollection of their College life, even though it may have been a hard one at the time. For ourselves, as we look back, not so many years, that time rises again before us. We call to mind the dark mornings on which we hurried to College, only half awake ; the midnight hours of solitary study, when we heard the clock strike two, three, four, five, through the silent house ; the time when we wearily rose to our day's work, and saw the moon hardly moved from that place in the sky which it held when we lay down to our poor hour of rest. We call to mind the half-dozen chairs littered with old books, fished out from the dustiest corners of the college library ; the pages of paper daily covered, with a pleasant sense, unknown to other work, that here was something tangible accomplished ; the indescribable feeling of weariness growing day by day ; the pen which, towards the end of the session, we could sometimes scarcely hold in the trembling hand, till we had got warmed with half an hour's work ; the ' constitutional walk '

for an hour before dinner ; the delightful Saturday evening allowed to relaxation ; the carrying in the prize essays ; the list made out of all the prizes we were competing for, how many we shall not say ; the thankfulness rather than pride with which during the last fortnight of the session, we marked off each in succession as won ; the throbbing anxiety of the first of May, which was to decide the University essay prizes ; and how musical the Principal's voice as he read out the mottoes we knew so well ; then the delightful relief of total leisure in those bright days of May ; the summer-time spent in research and labour against another session ; the intense veneration for *work* which a man comes to have when he knows what it means. Nothing to others, all these things are deeply interesting to one's own self ; and perhaps they may touch some chords of recollection in some of our old college companions, now scattered over every quarter of the earth. We believe that for real hard work, for real mental discipline, for training to habits of industry and self-denial, for fitting average men to fill respectably an average place in society, there are very few things better than *College Life at Glasgow*.

CONCLUSION.

THESE were the kind of thoughts that passed through my mind in the leisure hours of various months in town. The hours, indeed, in which I have been free from the pressure of duty, were short; and they were not many: yet, by regular use, one may turn even these to some account. All kinds of hours, morning and evening, of every day of the week except Saturday and Sunday, have gone to the production of these pages. I have not an evergreen now, though I have planted so many; nor am I the possessor of a single tree of any kind. And when I go and visit the pleasant homes of certain friendly country parsons, I feel my loss; and I sigh a little for the days that are gone. And so these pages have not been thought out amid the sunshiny and breezy places where I wrote certain other pages which possibly you have read. Many of them were thought out by a city fireside; some of them in solitary half-hour walks on quiet winter evenings in a certain broad gas-lit street, remarkable for that absence of passers-by which is characteristic

of many of the streets of this beautiful city. But especially I remember many restful hours, happily combining duty with leisure, which are within the reach of every unambitious Scotch clergyman. I mean the hours which on one day in each month he may spend in attending the Presbytery to which he belongs. The Presbytery, possibly you do not know, is a court of the Scotch Church ; consisting of the clergymen of a number of adjoining parishes with a lay member from each parish besides. This court exercises over a certain district of country the authority which in England is exercised by a Bishop. It is the duty of every member to be present : so that while attending its sittings you have a pleasant sense that you are in the way of your duty. The business of this Ecclesiastical Court is of deep interest to those who feel a deep interest in it. And a weighty responsibility rests with those members of it whose experience and administrative ability are such as entitle them and fit them to lead their brethren. But a good many of the clergy, especially of the younger clergy, have no vocation that way ; and the very eloquent and remarkably long speeches which are often made, would be somewhat wearisome if you tried to listen to them. But if you do not try to listen to them, unless at some specially interesting juncture, or when some one is speaking whose words carry special weight, you may have many hours of leisure there ; and think of material

for various chapters like those you have been reading. I have found my hours at the Presbytery very favourable to contemplation, as well as a delightful rest to body and mind. You are in the path of duty : and yet you feel that your insignificance makes your responsibility quite inappreciable. You do your work, we may hope, as a parish clergyman, diligently and not unsuccessfully. But as an ecclesiastical lawyer and legislator, in all probability, your influence is very properly at zero. You have entire confidence that the affairs of the district are being managed by wise and good men, who are your seniors in age and your superiors in wisdom. So you may enjoy a day of rest : and of rest happily combined with duty. I have a very great veneration and affection for the Church of England : but I do not think that grand Establishment affords her clergy any season, recurring regularly and not unfrequently, during which they may feel that they are attending to their clerical duty, while yet they are quite free from any sense of responsibility and from any feeling that they are doing anything whatever.

And so I commend these chapters to the kindly reader, hoping that they are not the last.

LONDON

PRINTED BY SPOTTISWOODE AND CO.

NEW-STREET SQUARE

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF A. K. H. B. TO FRASER'S
MAGAZINE, &c.

Nearly ready, in One Volume, post 8vo.

THE AUTUMN HOLIDAYS OF A
COUNTRY PARSON:

Essays Consolatory, Æsthetical, Moral, Social, and Domestic.
Being a Selection from the Contributions of A. K. H. B.
to *Fraser's Magazine* and to *Good Words*.

Recently published,

THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY
PARSON: SECOND SERIES.

Uniform with the Popular Edition of the FIRST SERIES, in
crown 8vo. price 3s. 6d. cloth.

CONCERNING THE PARSON'S CHOICE BETWEEN TOWN AND
COUNTRY.

CONCERNING DISAPPOINTMENT AND SUCCESS.

CONCERNING GIVING UP AND COMING DOWN.

CONCERNING THE WORRIES OF LIFE, AND HOW TO MEET
THEM.

CONCERNING THE DIGNITY OF DULNESS.

CONCERNING GROWING OLD.

CONCERNING SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS; with some Thoughts
upon the Swing of the Pendulum.

CONCERNING CHURCHYARDS.

CONCERNING SUMMER DAYS.

London: LONGMAN, GREEN, and CO. Paternoster Row.

THE COMMONPLACE PHILOSOPHER IN TOWN AND COUNTRY:

A Selection from the Contributions
of A. K. H. B. to *Fraser's Magazine*, with
other Occasional Essays. A new edition, being the Second,
uniform with 'Leisure Hours in Town,' in
crown 8vo. price 3s. 6d. cloth.

CONTENTS.

TO WORK AGAIN.

CONCERNING THE WORLD'S OPINION; WITH SOME
THOUGHTS ON COWED PEOPLE.

CONCERNING THE SORROWS OF CHILDHOOD.

CONCERNING ATMOSPHERES; WITH SOME THOUGHTS ON
CURRENTS.

CONCERNING BEGINNINGS AND ENDS.

GOING ON.

CONCERNING DISAGREEABLE PEOPLE.

OUTSIDE.

GETTING ON.

CONCERNING MAN AND HIS DWELLING-PLACE.

CONCERNING A GREAT SCOTCH PREACHER.

AT THE LAND'S END.

London: LONGMAN, GREEN, and CO. Paternoster Row.

1286

PR 4161 .B45 L4 1864

C.1

Leisure hours in town /

Stanford University Libraries



3 6105 041 063 137

DATE DUE			

STANFORD UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA 94305-6004

